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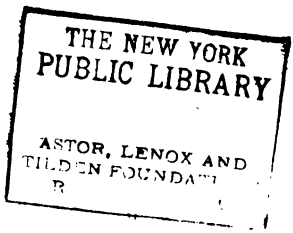
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No. 66.

The Play-Actress

BY

S. R. Crockett

AUTHOR OF "THE RAIDERS," ETC., ETC.

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

NEW YORK
27 West Twenty-third St.

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To

SIR JOHN COWAN, OF
BEESLACK, BART. :

Dear Sir John,

It cheered me that a man reverend by years and of approven wisdom should care for my child's love tale.

Will you accept of it from me, not for what it is, but for what is behind it?

S. R. CROCKETT.

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THE PLAY-ACTRESS.

The Play-Actress.

CHAPTER I.

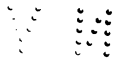
SABBATH DAY IN THE KIRK OF THE HILL.

IT was the preacher's opening prayer. William Greig, elder, was in his place, and there was not a seat vacant in all that silent church. The Old Hundred had gone up to the throne of God with a grand rush, swinging from the hearts of these plain Scottish folk like the tramp of armies. William Greig always thought of his dead wife as they sang it, and of sitting by her side when the white cloths were laid in the Hill Kirk for the earthly communion of the saints.

Then through the hush come the opening sentences of the prayer of invocation. The voice of the Great Preacher, clear, rich, and resonant in oratory, takes on a tenderer and more intimate tone in prayer. There runs through its pathetic fall a vibration as though the minister's heart were singing like an Æolian harp as the breath of the Spirit of God blew through its strings.

"For the weak and the sinful, O Lord, we pray; for those who often say to themselves, 'I will make a full end, and the end is not yet'; for lonely men with hidden sins gnawing at their hearts, who are compelled to wear a fair front, we pray. Do Thou have mercy on them."

And in the corner by the gallery an elder bowed his head, and said—



"Father, forgive, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

"For the weary and the heavy laden, Lord, we pray; for those who have none on the earth to whom to tell their grief. Teach them to know how to tell it to Thyself when the nights are long and the morning watches silent."

And William Greig, low to himself, said—

"I am that man!"

"Them that are young, forget not," pleaded the thrilling voice, quivering and throbbing high among the plain beams of the sanctuary, as though it were soaring upward, seeking for God among the stars. "Forget them not even when they have forgotten Thee. May they know that the heart of the Father is willing to receive and to for-

give. If we that are fathers upon the earth are so ready to forgive, how much more ready art Thou to pardon and receive!"

Deep within him the Great Preacher was crying out, "Oh, my boy Willie, lad of my love and of the dead mother's care, where art thou? May the Lord in His providence send thee home after these many years." This was his unspoken, perpetual prayer.

High in the dusk of the gallery, where only two skylights look down, like high-set peep-holes for the angels to spy out men's hearts as they sit in the narrow pews, a young woman sat, her head bowed on her hand, and the tears dripping steadily through her thin fingers. She wore a plain black dress, and a fair-haired little girl sat beside her.

"Remember, Lord," the prayer con-

tinued, pouring from the old high-galleried pulpit, "all those whom others have forgotten, those who have been wronged and trodden upon, whose burden is heavier than they can bear. Be Thou near them, great Bearer of Burdens, Sharer of the Yoke, Thou Strong Son of the Strong Lord."

The prayer ended in the rising rustle of the heart-bowed congregation. The young woman in the gallery stilled her sobs, dried her tears, as she sat up. Then low within herself she said—

"He is not as I thought him to be. I shall stay and speak to him at the end. It may be that he will yet forgive!"

CHAPTER II.

THE LASS IN BLACK.

SO the Great Preacher finished his sermon in the Kirk of the Hill. Then there was a solemn pause. The collection was now to be taken. Up from their seats arose the elders—grave, grey-headed, responsible men, as it became the children of the Covenant even unto the third and fourth generation. But the collection was a very solemn thing. It was an act of worship. William Greig lifted his serene, hill-country face, and placed in his own elder's collecting-box the florin, which as a "bien" and comfortable farmer, he could afford. Gregson Key, the old weaver who had walked in three miles

from the Rhonefoot, leaning on the top of his staff, got ready his groat. That meant that for one week he must take his porridge three times a day without the dash of small ale which Gregson used to slocken them down withal!

"I 'm better withoot it, at ony rate," he said. "Desires for the luxuries o' this world, its gauds and vainities, are no' becomin' in a Cameronian. An' efter a', when I read in Patrick Walker an' guid John Howie's buik aboot the sufferin's o' the distressed an' only true Protestin' Remnant, I 'm black shamed that I should think on wantin' sic a thing as sma' yill."

So Gregson Key gave valiantly his groat and vanquished the lust of the flesh.

Mary M'Vane, the Whinnyliggate carrier, and her sister Jean had had

it in their hearts for nearly five years to get new bonnets. But instead they continued to lay by sixpence a week to the support of ordinances and did with the old—the materials of which had been turned as regularly twice a year for seventeen years as the procession of the equinoxes. It was Mary who put in the sixpence, and Jean dunched her with her elbow to teach her to rebuke her self-satisfaction. Thus Jean and Mary conquered the lust of the eye, and went home talking about the sermon, but in a small corner of their hearts also thinking about the doing up of their bonnets, a thought they would severally rather have died than have owned to one another. But they both owned it that night to their Maker with much contrition. For it took them all their

time to make each other remember that it was not by works of righteousness that they could be saved—that is, by sixpences in the plate, or yet by restraining the vain adorning of their persons. It was, indeed, very likely that the prideful thoughts engendered by doing up their bonnets and giving to ordinances might even be recorded against them. So at once they mortified the flesh and the spirit—the flesh by giving up the sixpences which might have bought them new bonnets, and the spirit by blaming themselves for the spiritual pride which the sacrifice engendered.

The elders taking the collection went slowly and leisurely along the seats, from which all the "buiks" had been removed. The plain deal boxes, of age coeval with the building of the

kirk, slid along the seats with a gentle, equable noise, as the coppers and silver severally rattled and dripped into them. It was generally the ancient, solid members of the Kirk of the Hill that gave the last, while the strangers, dibbled somewhat thickly and obviously among the true sheep, dropped the clattering pennies.

William Kelly, betheral to the Kirk of the Hill, looked censoriously at the collection when it was emptied out on the table of the little vestry.

"I wonder that man owre at the Kirk o' Keltonhill canna keep his folk at hame. Their bawbees are like to gie our bonny white collection the black jaundice."

It is to be feared that he was referring to the worshippers from the neighbouring parish church who had been

seduced into the Kirk on the Hill by the fame of the Great Preacher.

The Great Preacher came down quietly as the kirk scaled, and received in dignified and tender silence, broken only by a word or two of sympathy, the soft-spoken congratulations of some who remembered him as a youth, for they were many who stayed behind in order to grasp him for a moment by the hand.

The last worshipper was gone out. Stephen Armstrong was in the session-house with his elders as they counted the collection. The Great Preacher stood with his hands behind him, still breathing quickly with the exercise of the sermon, looking through the doorway over the prospect of snug homestead and cosy town. Half a shire lay beneath the Kirk of the Hill,

and behaved itself all the better for the sight of that straight, steep, barn-like roof, cutting clear against the sky.

A young woman in black, holding a little girl by the hand, came up the path to speak with him. Gilbert Rutherford withdrew his eyes from the haze of afternoon that lay over the half-dozen parishes of the sea-board, and let them rest on the young woman's face.

But she did not offer to shake hands with him, though he stretched out his hand instinctively towards her. The daughter of one of his former acquaintances in this place, he thought—a sweet-looking lass, better dressed than common.

But the young woman looked him very straight in the face, and there was

something in her eye to hold his soul attentive.

"Can you still do justly and love mercy," said the young woman in black, "or have you preached all your righteousness away?"

It was a strange address. The accent was English of the south, and the words were spoken with an incision and a directness foreign to Galloway.

The Great Preacher was arrested. He had not been so spoken to since his own father dealt with him after the success of his first day's preaching—when he was, like Mary and Jean over their sixpence, in danger of falling into the sin of spiritual pride.

But he recognised the voice of one faithful and reverent by nature, though the mouth that spake, being that of a young and not ill-favoured English-

woman, was a most unlikely one from which a rebuke to a preacher of the Reformed and Covenanted Kirk of Scotland should proceed. "But," said Gilbert Rutherford to himself, "far be it from me to bind the spirit of the Lord—He spake by the mouth of Balaam's ass, wherefore not by that of an Englishwoman?"

"I trust," said the Great Preacher, looking as straightly and simply into the eyes of the young girl as though she had been his equal in years and standing—"I trust that both before and after preaching the Word I can do justly and love mercy. No man has accused me of being lacking in either"—a swift thought struck him —"though often they might have done so," he added, with characteristic self-reproach.

"Then," said the young woman, with the same strange directness, "today you have spoken and prayed about the prodigal. Here is the prodigal's child for you to cherish—the daughter of William Rutherford, your son, who died on the Island of Jamaica. Before nightfall you can prove your preaching."

The Great Preacher was also a great man, which is not so common. His eyelid did not quiver, though his heart leapt to hear from the lips of this stranger girl that, though there was no new mound beside those down on the green strath by the Warristoun Water, the last of his blood and name had passed away from the earth.

Yet even in that moment he took the stroke obediently from the Lord's hand as he had taken all the rest. But

this time it was harder, for he was not by to receive the last message and to close the eye of his youngest and dearest son.

"You say my son is dead," he said at last, very quietly.

"Your son is dead," replied the girl.

"Bring you any message from him to me?" asked Gilbert Rutherford.

The girl handed him a letter.

It was brief, written on thin paper blurred and wrinkled, and in characters which slanted irregularly across the page, heedless of the faint blue rulings.

"Father," the letter began, "I mind me now in a far country of the prodigal you speak of, but yon one had the better of me. He arose and went to his father. I would arise to come to you, but cannot. I lie on my dying

bed on the sea-board of this Isle of Jamaica and drink the bitter cup I brewed. You would receive your boy Willie, I well know. Even now you would forgive me. Could I come, I should have no fear of that. I wish I were just as sure of God. But I 'll e'en have to risk it. There 's a bairn of mine in London. I beseech you, if an opportunity comes, take the child into your home—but never the mother, even if she be still alive and should ask to be received. Somehow, I want to think that my little lass that I shall see no more in this world may hear the noise of the Warristoun Water as it runs past the garden end down to the Grey Town, as I heard when I was still your boy, and innocent. Father, take the bairn if she comes to you, for the sake of the boy that played horses

with you in the old orchard among the apple trees! Oh, let her not out of that bonny garden into the cruel world. Father, pray for me, even though I be dead before this comes to you. The Lord will hear you even if He has me in the deep pit. Pray, father, and for the bit lassie's sake, and His own Son's sake, He will hear. Good-night, my father; I must stop. The candle is going out."

The letter stopped without signature or other farewell, as though the ink had run dry. Gilbert Rutherford did not think of the theology of the last passage, for his tears were running now like rain. His heart told him that here the candle had indeed gone out.

The young woman in black had withdrawn herself and stood apart. The little girl was playing with the daisies

on the grass under the kirk dyke. There were many there.

"Thank God," he said to himself. "I am glad my boy is not a castaway. He trusted me and he would not have been ashamed. Should he trust God in vain? God forbid! 'If ye then being evil,'" he quoted, "'how much more shall your Heavenly Father?'"

The Great Preacher turned to the girl. Within himself he was persuaded to take the child, but for all that he was a Scot, and the blood in him, being hot but cautious, made him ask questions.

"And who are you that bring my son's daughter to me?" he asked kindly.

The girl looked him in the face.

"I act stage plays in London," she said, plainly and simply.

"Are you the mother of the child?" cried Gilbert Rutherford, seeing himself suddenly in deep waters.

"I am sister to her who is," said the girl.

"Then why do you take the young child away from her mother?" said the preacher, eying the girl with his lids drooped, and only a pencil dot of light shining steadily under the grey stoop of his drawn brows.

"Because the mother, my sister, that was your son's wife, has now no claim on her child. I am not a lawyer, but I shall put you in communication with those who can satisfy you of that."

"And where is the mother, my son's widow?"

"Once she was wife. Now she is neither widow nor wife," said the girl, with a certain sternness of justice which

was not lost upon that very just man, Gilbert Rutherford.

"How that?" said he, quickly, having been born in Edinburgh.

"He divorced her!" said the girl, looking away for the first time.

"For cause?" queried Gilbert.

"How else?" said the girl, with a kind of breaking cry that told more than anything the restraint she had put upon herself.

"Now," she said, "I will leave you with your son's child. I heard that you were to be in Cairn Edward to-day, and I had friends in the neighbourhood. I love the child more than my life. But she must be brought up away from her mother, from the life in the city, from everything—and from me," she added, with a sob.

"Come back to the Grey Town with

us," said Gilbert Rutherford, impulsively, forgetting for an instant his position. His heart was strangely moved through all his sixty years by the plain spoken, clear-eyed girl in black, who acted stage plays in London.

"And the elders of the kirk?" queried the girl, with wonderful sense for an Englishwoman.

Gilbert Rutherford came to himself in a moment. He knew that in this she was right.

"You at least are good and true. You will tell me your name and where I can find you?" he said.

"I am called Bessie Upton; but it is better that you should not know where to find me. I shall always be able to find *you*."

"And what will you do?" he asked, with some anxiety.

"I shall go back to London and support my sister as I have done before."

"You will allow me to help——"

"No," said the girl, "that I cannot. I have brought you all that can have any claim on you.—Ailie!" she called to the child, suddenly.

The little girl came running to her.

"Look, Aunt Bessie, what pretty daisies I have found for you. Take them all from Ailie!" she cried.

The heart of Gilbert Rutherford gave a great stound. That was his wife's name, the name of the Ailie that had been his bride and Willie's mother.

"How can you give her up?" he said, wondering, looking from the one to the other.

The actress of stage plays turned on the minister for the first time with a sudden anger.

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"Oh, what right have you, who are getting all, to make it harder for me than it is!" she cried, clasping her white nervous fingers.

"You will come to see her?" said Gilbert Rutherford.

"It were better not," she said yieldingly.

He knew that also to be true, but in spite of that thought he said again—

"But you will come?"

"I will come!" she said.

CHAPTER III.

CLEARING AFTER STORM.

BESSIE UPTON, the play-actress, walked very steadily down the narrow gravel path from the western door of the Kirk of the Hill. The light of her life was suddenly, as it were, gone out. No more would Aunt Bessie feel the pressure of the little hand that had given her a new hold on life. It was ended, and there was a singing in her ears. It was done. It was right. She had no regrets. He was a good man; but, spite of all, the light would persist in brightening and darkening, without reason, the trees most strangely take to running round. There was rain

falling on her hand. Yet the sun shone and the sky was blue.

From the other doorway, by the session-house, Stephen Armstrong, the young minister of the Kirk of the Hill, watched her. He knew her for a stranger. No one in Cairn Edward walked like that. Yet there was a something about her carriage. The girl did not look strong. Evidently she had stopped behind to speak to Dr. Gilbert Rutherford, and now she was going away. But stay, there was a little girl with the doctor—whom he had never seen before. They were walking towards him.

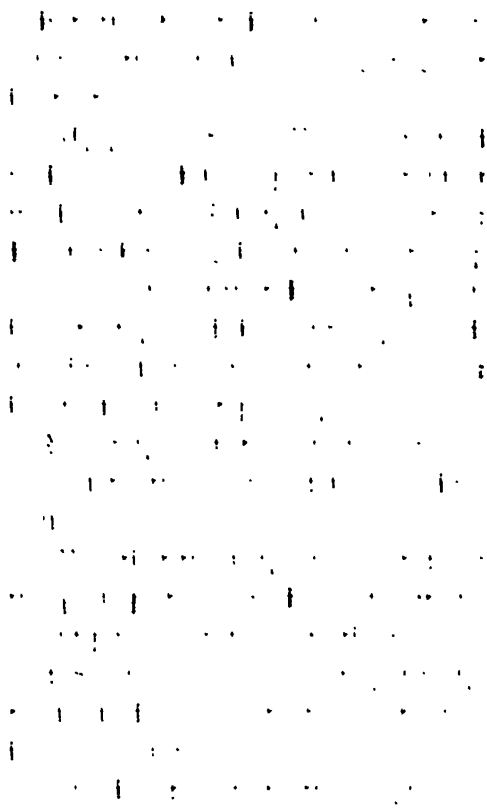
This is what Stephen Armstrong thought as he stood and talked to his most troublesome office-bearer. Then for the first time the Great Preacher put his hand into the hand of his child's

child, for the grandfather is the parent once removed, and the removal has done him good.

But none of these things came into the mind of Dr. Gilbert as he took that confiding little hand in his, and went down to meet young Stephen Armstrong. He had, on the other hand, a double sense of responsibility—even of fear. He was a man of sixty. How should he bring up a child of five years with a floss of sunny curls forever getting in her eyes? There were heart-breaks before both of them, he foresaw, and her strange upbringing would no doubt made the matter worse.

"This is my granddaughter," he said calmly, to Stephen Armstrong, as he met him half-way down the walk.

That tall, dark, clean-shaven young man looked suddenly aghast.



house, I am informed," said the circuit Preacher gravely.

"Has she? Do you know that author?" asked Stephen, more eagerly than there was warrant for.

"I do not," answered Dr. Richardson, with some brevity. "Her own name is Miss Lee, I am told."

"No, no! Her name is Nell Gwynne. Spoke it she did in a girl's merry, speaking way, as she first came," thought the young man. But when she says her name is Miss Lee, Miss Lee it must be.

Stephen Fairbourn, tossed in unaccustomed doubt and by the whole mood of his mind, would not be shaped or moulded by, would not surrender to, the environment.

But the embarrassment of the moment was relieved by William Gough as the Vicar's boy. For him the morning's duty was not done till he came

to put his warm, friendly hand into that of the minister for the day, and give him thanks for every good word spoken. He was of the great Society of the Encouragers, who make the wheels of the world go round. May power be given to their elbows. Many a raw lad preaching his first or second sermon had been grateful for the hand-shake and the good cheer. Many a one had carried William Greig's voice with him in a nook of his memory as William himself might carry a lamb in the nook of his plaidie. There was once, they say, a sad-voiced, disappointed probationer, who had preached in vacancies and as "supply" for years which ran into two figures. He was so set up by a good word of William Greig's, that he pulled himself together the following Sabbath day, and

preached so well that he took a congregation by storm and got a call on the spot. He does not know it, but it was William Greig who got him that call.

So, with just as much heartiness as though he were a lame probationer or a raw student, William Greig came to say a word to Dr. Gilbert Rutherford. He shook the preacher warmly by the hand. It was quite impossible for him to shake hands in any other way. He would even have gripped the hand of an Episcopalian, and that cordially—especially if his own minister had not been looking.

"It's twenty-seven years since ye abode in my house—that was my father's then, doctor. I'm the young man that ye spoke to in the plantin' about his soul—William Greig of the

Nether Larg, wha under the Almichty Himsel' owes to you the soul that is in him the day."

Thus William Greig.

That is one of the glorious moments that come occasionally to the fisher of men, who fishes truly for souls, yet chiefly seems to throw away his endeavours—bait, line, and all. For such moments, though they come but rarely, it is worth while to live. Some die without one such; but yet surely somehow, here or there, near or far, their Master will surely make it up to them.

"I mind you, William; I mind you well. How could I forget?" said the preacher, gripping his hand also. "The years have brought us both to the silver grey, I see; and I doubt not many another change, William."

The two men looked each other in

the eyes, as only men do who meet after many years.

"When is Aunt Bessie coming back?" asked a little, reproachful voice, low down near the grass.

The two men dropped each other's hands and looked down, half ashamed of their forgetfulness. Little 'Ailie Rutherford was standing there very still and patient, with her hands crossed before her, a quaint and pretty figure.

"I cannot tell when Aunt Bessie will come back!" said her grandfather, sadly foreseeing many weary days for the little one.

"But you asked her, and she said that she would come," persisted the small, tender voice.

"Yes, she will come some day," said Dr. Rutherford, but not very brightly.

"Grandfather," she went on, "I am

to call you that, am I not? Aunt Bessie said so. Why did auntie cry when she went away? Auntie only cries when mamma is not well and speaks loud to her. But you are quite well, and you do not speak angrily. Aunt Bessie ought not to cry. Will you tell her so?"

The Great Preacher felt the limitations of a man.

Once more it was William Greig who relieved the strain.

"Doctor," said he, "will you not come up again to the hills and taste the caller air. A man may sup health by spoonfuls up at the Nether Larg. Come up and do us good! And bring this denty wee woman to get some colour into her cheeks. It will bring a blessing like that of the house of Obededom."

The doctor appeared to consider for a moment.

"I hae nae mistress noo, as ye may ken," said William Greig; "but there 's a lass or twa o' mine up yonder, that wad be prood to show the bonny wifie, whaur the gowans are thickest and the thorn blossom whitest."

It seemed a happy solution. It would give him time to bethink him self and, in the upland stillnesses, to form an acquaintance with this child of his later years.

"If the minister will allow," he said; "every man is under orders in another man's parish."

He looked at Stephen Armstrong as he spoke. That young man seemed somewhat absent-minded, for he said—

"I am glad that you have found friends in the neighbourhood."

"Yes," said the farmer of Nether Larg, "I hae reason to call the doctor my friend, if ever man spoke of another by that name."

And so it was settled. William Greig was to come for them on the following day about the middle of the forenoon. He had to come down "to get the rowny shod at ony rate," he said.

"Are the gowans flowers, grandfather?" inquired Ailie Rutherford the third, gently.

"Yes, my dear," said he.

"Will it be prettier than Richmond Park?" she asked again.

"I think it will," Gilbert Rutherford made answer, smiling.

The little maid sat down suddenly and unexpectedly and sobbed her heart out.

The minister knelt beside her in great distress, putting his arm about her.

"Why is it that you cry, dearie?" he said tenderly. "Tell me, and I will help it if I can."

The child was silent for a while, sobbing irregularly and irrepressibly.

"It is because it will be so lovely and Aunt Bessie will not be there to see it," she said.

The Great Preacher took her in his arms and walked down to the manse with her, comforting her. William Greig walked with him to the door. As for Stephen Armstrong, he followed in the rear meditating.

As they paused, before separating at the gate, William Greig said—

"What is her name?"

"Ailie!" said the doctor, looking

at her as her crumpled and tear-stained head lay on his shoulder; "that was my wife's name."

He spoke in a low tone, as if he were in a sick room.

"So it was of mine also!" said William Greig, in the same voice, but, if anything, yet lower.

The two men gripped hands, without looking at one another this time, and turned away.

So Warristoun Water and the Kirk on the Hill came very near together—just because a play-actor's little waif was named Ailie.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE GREAT PREACHER.

BUT the morrow was not yet come. Stephen Armstrong had a housekeeper, a lady of severe aspect and severer morals, known and feared as "Girzie of the Manse." Of her, little Ailie Rutherford the third would have none.

"Aunt Bessie said as how I was to be grandfather's little girl. It 's kind of you, black lady; but Aunt Bessie knows best."

And this was her reply to all overtures on the subject of bed and undressing. So the Great Preacher, with an odd pain in his bosom, began to

brush up his knowledge of buttons and hooks. There came to him a picture of himself that winter very long ago, when he and Ailie were so poor, and when their old servant went home ill, and left them alone away back in the little manse in the country.

There was his gentle Ailie bending over a little white heap of bedclothes, and there was he at the fireplace with a bairn on his knee—Ailie laughing brightly over her shoulder at his awkwardness, which was greater in finding that terrible "button of juncture" at the back than it had ever been in worrying out a knotty point in the "Original Hebrew."

Then, what was it that Ailie said?

The knot was hard in his throat now —constricted so that it hurt. Where were the bairnies now who made that

night the little manse blithe with their merry din?

All gone, lying side by side on the green howes of Warristoun, save only Willie—whose buttons it was so hard to find because the rogue systematically pulled them off—he all his lone by the wash of warm tropic seas.

But in a little this younger Ailie was on the minister's knees, and he said—

"To-night you must be a good girl, for you are to sleep in grandfather's bed. He will look after you. But he does not know much about little girls, and so you must help him."

"Had n't you never no little girls, grandpa?" said the little maid.

"Yes, my dear, I had little girls," said Gilbert Rutherford, "an Ailie like you, a little Isobel——"

There was a pause for a little.

"But why are you sad, grandfather? Did *you* have to take them and leave them in some one else's house, like Aunt Bessie lefted me, so as they could undress them and take care of them?"

"Yes," said the Great Preacher, "that is just it. I took them and left them in Some One else's house!"

"Then you must n't look cryful, grandfather, for Aunt Bessie says, 'T is for our good' and 'T is right'—that 's what she says!"

Ailie stopped, shaking her head, a wistful little witch, and then went on thoughtfully—

"But perhap she was n't as good 's you?"

"Who?" said Gilbert Rutherford, startled.

"Your little childun's grandfather that you left them with, you know."

"But He is—far kinder and better!" said Gilbert, quickly.

"Did you cry when you took the train tickets, like Aunt Bessie did under the big arch, where the engines go '*Hoo—Hoo?*'"

"I fear I did," said Gilbert to his small inquisitor.

And he felt himself smiling strangely through an environing mist.

In time the mystery of hooks and eyes, of ties and buttons, cleared itself a little. But a new terror fixed itself upon his soul—how next morning he would ever put all these things together. He remembered once that, with the help of an article in the Encyclopædia, he had taken down his watch with great satisfaction to himself, but

had entirely failed to put it together on the following morning. For with much natural depravity it had resolved itself into a tangle of wheels and springs laid out on a sheet of grey paper.

The cases were analogous. The maze of ties, strings, bands and buttons before him on the floor looked more hopeless than the watch had done.

"Time for my bath!" said Ailie, crisp and sharp.

A new danger was here.

The Great Preacher shamelessly prevaricated.

"To-morrow perhaps grandfather will have a bath for his little girl. To-night we are not in our own house, and you see grandfather did not know that his little girl was coming——"

"Oh, yes, I know," said Ailie,

brightly. "I am not to worry grandfather if I don't get everyfing I want."

She repeated this excellent moral precept like the headline of a copy-book.

"For some things may not be for little girls, good—as baths, specially when it's cold, lessons, and nasty medicine," she added, nodding her head as she enumerated.

At last, soberly endued upon with trailing white, infinitely overwide for her, and looking more quaint and delightsome than ever, the little fairy figure came and plumped down at his knee. Then she began without a preface or warning—

"Jesus, tender Seppard, hear me,
Bless Thy little lamb to-night;
In the darkness be Thou near me,
Keep me safe till morning light."

Gilbert Rutherford sat rebuked. He had been debating how he would begin to teach the rudiments of religion to this child reared among the play-actors.

"From all the dangers of this night keep little Ailie. God bless grandfather that is far away—oh, no, but he is n't now—and mother, and dear father that is coming home to his little girl, and Aunt Bessie, for she is the *very* goodest aunt, and make Ailie a much better girl, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

The little elf was up from her knees in a moment, as soon as the "Amen" had been despatched.

"Now climb—*and* hug—*and* fairy story!" she exclaimed, denting her fat arms into her grandfather's neck, and nuzzling as far under his chin as she could get her head to go.

Gilbert was so surprised that for a moment he looked doubtful and bewildered. Looking up, the child caught the expression. Her face fell.

"Didn't Ailie say them good?" she asked anxiously.

"Say what good?" he queried, in return, looking down at her.

"Why, Ailie's prayers, of course."

"Yes, very good indeed. They were good prayers!" said Gilbert, with conviction.

His own were often not so good.

"And plenty of them—no skipping —or skimpin'?"

The little witch had a pleasant sing-song, slow way of speaking sometimes, dwelling on the syllables—which was indeed one of her permanent and most delightful assets. Then again she would rap out her words like raindrops falling

on the bottom of a tin water-can sitting under the eaves.

"No," said her grandfather, "no skipping or skimping."

"Well, then, my fairy story, *if* you please," she said, laying her head down contentedly to listen. "*I* like one 'bout Jack the Giant-killer best—big giants, with the biggest kind of teeth and—oh, lots of blood!"

The Great Preacher had no stock of the article required, and he looked more nonplussed than if he had been asked to preach a sermon without knowing his own text. And this was his own particular brand of nightmare.

"Isn't fairy stories good for little girls?" said the small Ailie, very anxiously indeed. For the whole future was at stake.

"Oh, yes, good enough," said Gil-

bert, hastily; "but you see it is so long since grandfather told any, that he has forgotten."

"But you can make it up as you go along, same as Aunt Bessie. Or, if you are n't clever like her, you can tell me the same story you did in church this morning. That was nearly as good as Jack the Giant-killer. It was that one, you know, 'bout the boy that runned away from his father—but afterwards when he got very hungry he came back —an' his father gave him things. But," she added sternly and firmly, "if he had been *my* boy, I 'd have whipped him right soundly and sent him to bed. Tell that, grandfather—tell it long and good."

"I shall tell you as long a one as I can, Ailie, my lassie; but not that one to-night. Are you not cold?" he said, anxiously and suddenly.

He drew his plaid about them as they sat on the edge of the bed. Now, Stephen Armstrong's Girzie had her ear at the keyhole outside. That is how nearly every one in the village knew all this the next day.

"Well," said little Ailie, "just tell me as long a one as you have time for, before you go out. Are you on in the first act, grandfather?"

The Great Preacher's heart gave a knock that resounded in his own ears, but the little lass went on, heedless—

"'Cause Aunt Bessie tells me a long one when her call is not till the second; and, oh my!—a regular 'free-decker' when she gets off till the third. An' sometimes old Aunt Rebecca stands quite a while with her knitting-basket over her arm, scolding Aunt Bessie and telling her that she 'll be late—and catch

it from Mr. Cartwright. He's stage manager, you know."

The little girl nodded severely.

"Who is Aunt Rebecca?" asked Gilbert Rutherford, wrapping the plaid closer, and gathering up a pair of bare little feet into his hands, where he kept them.

"Why, she's just old Aunt Rebecca, that has got white hair, and knitting—and says, 'You must n't.' She waits for Aunt Bessie when she's on, and comes home with her."

It seemed an unnecessary explanation. Every one knew who Aunt Rebecca was.

"Now, the story!" said Ailie, with the air of one who has talked enough about nothing.

So out of the treasures of his mind, overlaid with a myriad sermons and

infinite store of reading, Grandfather Gilbert fished an old child's story of fairies and giants and green rings till the little figure nestled closer in a rapture of content, saying at every pause—

"Go on, it 's dust splendid; and what did the wicked giant do next?"

"It was fair scandalous," said Stephen Armstrong's Girzie the next day, over the hedge to her pet gossip. "It should be kenned. Here was the man that the silly folk about here delights to honour, an' there he was at nine o' the clock on a Sabbath nicht forgettin' to come decently ben to the parlour to tak' the 'Buik'—and what think ye he was doin'?"

"Nay, I kenna!" said Mistress MacClever, looking out with eager eyes, in a way that showed that she for one put

no bounds to the iniquity of ministers. This was a fine tale to tell, indeed.

"Weel," said Girzie of the Manse, "it 's a bonnie-like story to say aboot a Doctor o' Diveenity, and I howp for his ain sake that it 'll never come to the lugs o' his kirk-session; but it 's that disgracefu' that I canna help tellin' ye."

"Juist that na?" said Mistress MacClever, trying to think which of the neighbours was at that moment at home that she might be the first to run and tell it.

"Of coorse, ye 'll no' say a word aboot it!"

"Of coorse no'; ye weel ken I 'm no' that kind," said Mistress MacClever, finally deciding on the tailor's wife, because she had always a dish of tea standing ready by the hearth.

Girzie of the Manse became very impressive. She picked off the Great Preacher's iniquities with her forefinger on the manse dyke.

"Weel, he talked to the bairn aboot plays an' play-actors, aboot giants an' fairies, an' siccan balderdash—on the Sabbath nicht, too, mind ye, after preaching twice! An' then, to crown a,' what did the man do but licht a bit stick that was in the grate, and make reed *Ingry-Doories*, waving the burnt stick in the gloamin' o' the chamber!"

"Ye dinna tell me!" said Mistress MacClever. "Heard I ever the like o' that? Dear sirs!"

Manse Girzie stayed her with her hand.

"There 's far waur to come," she said solemnly. "That 's nocht."

"Waur canna be," said Mistress

MacClever. "What wull the tailor's wife say?"

Girzie of the Manse went on:

"Then when the bairn was tired—mind you, it was far by Buik-time—gin the misguided man didna pit her to sleep, singing—

"Katie Bairdie had a coo,
Black and white aboot the moo;
Wasna that a dainty coo?
Dance, Kaitie Bairdie!"

There was silence for two clock ticks over the manse dyke.

"He maunna win aff wi' the like o' that," said Mistress MacClever, with emphasis. "It behoves that it shall be brocht to the notice o' the session!"

"Ay," said Manse Girzie, "an' a bonnie, unfaceable-like story ony way for a lass to step up to a minister and

leave a bairn on his hand at the kirk door!"

Now, Girzie called herself a Christian, and sat regularly at the white tables of Communion.

CHAPTER V.

THE GREAT PREACHER PLAYS "HARD-HEADS."

THERE is nothing so fresh as a fine morning—except a young child waking from its beauty sleep. There is in both the same air of wide-eyed surprise, the same dewy freshness, the same angelic smile—that is, we say "angelic" because we do not know what else to call it. But indeed, the angels are hardly likely to better it much.

Little Ailie woke from the sleep upon her grandfather's bed in the Manse of the Hill, with Gilbert Rutherford sitting watching her. It brought many old

things to his remembrance, and there was the tang of the herb Bitter-Sweet in his mouth that every son of man learns to know the taste of in passing through the world. Every woman is born with a taste for it. She likes to take her smiles with the dew of a tear on the cheek, and her sorrows are lighted with alternate remembrance and hope like the sun glinting upon a stormy sea.

It was sweet to watch this little girl awaken. There was yet on her cheeks the flush of sleep. The faint dew broke in tiny beads on the faint purple shade beneath her closed eyes as breaks the moisture on the inner petals of a rose. Her mouth's twin geranium leaves had fallen a little way apart. But she sat up in bed, sheathed like a white lily, as soon as her eyes had opened wide—the

dark brightness of sleep being not yet gone out of them.

"Grandfather," she said—"grandfather, is this the day Aunt Bessie is coming to her little girl?"

"No, not to-day," said Gilbert Rutherford, a little tired and a little disappointed with the child's persistence.

"Because if it was I should sing my hymn first, and pray after; but now I shall first pray, and then perhaps I shall feel like singing."

With many failures on the minister's part, and many inquiries on hers, the little girl took upon her something like the appearance she presented on the day before; but the tying of a bow in her sash was beyond the resources of the Great Preacher. For this contingency had not been provided for in his study of the original tongues.

Finally, it was tied in a wisp in front, in which form it shortly after excited the pity and contempt of Jeannie Greig of the Nether Larg when they arrived at that stirring farm-town out upon the wide moors.

Stephen Armstrong seemed much troubled that Dr. Rutherford and his little girl would no longer bide with him, but he recognised the wisdom of the arrangement. It was about eleven when William Greig came in person with his ample gig, round in the back and set low, at once wide and easy. William Greig always ordered a gig for three, and could take four at a pinch. "Capacity before elegance" was his sole direction to his admirable coach-builder along at the "general's smiddy."

So the Great Preacher and his little maid took their way, and Stephen

promised to visit them during the week. On the road up there were many things for the town-bred little lass to see.

"Do the trees never get dirty here?" she asked, looking at the noble oaks that held broad and massive spreads of foliage over the wayside. Next she admired the great grey-stemmed beeches, with their dry rustling leaves that were so fresh and sweet.

She had, of course, won the heart of William Greig at once, chiefly because her name was Ailie. She had a thousand questions to ask—a thousand raptures as she saw each new bud or flower. Yet she had a familiarity with the names of some of these that astonished her grandfather.

"That is a chaffinch!" she said, as brisk as that little bird itself, as he sat

and preened himself, and sang "*Chip! Chip! Chee!*" on the paling.

"It is what we ca' a 'bricht lintie,'" said William Greig, giving quite correctly the local name.

But Ailie settled the question.

"*I* call him a chaffinch, and that is what Aunt Bessie calls him. She took me to see them in the park. They fight with the sparrows, and I hope they always win. It was fun to see them splash each other with water, and then they laugh."

"I have seen them splash water, but I never heard ours laugh!" said William Greig, sedately.

"That was because my Aunt Bessie was not with you, or they would have laughed fast enough," said the loyal Ailie.

So they made their way up to the

hill farm. Birds rose on all sides of them. One foolish hen pheasant ran along in front of the horse, while Ailie shrieked herself into tears of laughter, clapping her hands to see it scuttle along, with thin, pin-wire twinkling legs.

"It looks so funny running that way with its wings drooped," she said. "Does it forget that it can fly?" she asked, which was indeed the explanation.

But in a little, the dyke getting lower by the roadside, at last it fluttered over. Then a bumble-bee came fooling after them, mooning round and humming in a dozy kind of way, yet keeping up with the gig as easily as if Brown Bess were standing still.

"It thinks my hat is a garden of flowers," said Ailie, who was a flower

herself. "Aunt Bessie, she says that I'm like a whole posy. But I love bumble-bees, except but when they sit down. Then there is a warm place where they sit!"

"How do you know?" said Gilbert Rutherford, smiling very content.

"It was down in Surrey, you see," said the little maid, "where Aunt Bessie tooked me once when mother was not well. I have two mothers, you know," she went on, in a matter-of-fact tone. "One of them is nice, and I like her, but the other one I am frightened for when she comes to the door. Then I hide. See; once she did that."

She turned up her little hand and showed the livid scar of a healed wound on her wrist.

"Sometimes she hurts Aunt Bessie, too. But, then, that is not my good

mother. *She* is still, and sits in the room all day by herself."

Gilbert Rutherford had a sense of shame. He had heard how the poor little Dauphin of France had given evidence against his own mother. But that was false. This, he feared, was true.

It was borne in upon him that there was a tragedy behind the black dress and the white cheek of the play-actress. And it was pressed upon him that he ought to investigate it.

"O, but the bumble-bee!" cried Ailie. "It was down on the hill above Witley, where there is the nicest church, all old and grown over, *so* sweet. Aunt Bessie and I were in a lane, the loveliest lane. There came a bumble, the biggest bumble—bigger nor ever you saw, you know the kind, band of brown across his tail——"

The Great Preacher smiled and nodded. He knew the kind. His boyish days came back to him, and he remembered how warm it was when such bumble-bees sat down.

"And he hummed," went on Ailie. "Yes, indeed; not fast, but lazy and don't care like, same as when you wake in the morning and hope it's not rising time. Then he got, this bumble, into a big white ''volvolus' hanging on the hedge. He straddled his legs and nearly tumbled out. He was such a jolly fat old bumble. And the ''volvolus' was so jumpy up and down, that at last he got tipped out and fell on his back. Then he got very cross when he had done this three times; and so would you, grandfather, if your pulpit box that you preach in did that to you—I know you would.

So he buzzed cross—you know, not sleepy and lazy any more, but sharper. So when Aunt Bess—she was walkin' slow and thinkin'—was not minding, I grabbed him quick, just only a moment —*and then I let go.* So would you, grandfather. So would most anybody. And Aunt Bessie she came and put the end of her key over the place where he sat down and pulled out the stinger, and kissed it good. But I doesn't think that kissing is as much use as it used to be, do you know, grandfather. Perhaps I 'm getting too big now."

Soon after they drove into the court-yard of the Nether Larg, and the dogs came bounding out clamorously. William Greig called his sons to quiet them, but as soon as her grandfather had lifted the little waif down, she went straight up to them, and Tweed

and Trusty became her friends in two minutes.

The Greig lasses, buxom and blooming, though at first a little shy, stood at the door to welcome the minister and his little maid.

Soon they were all of them within, and Ailie was climbing on Jeannie's knee. Within twenty minutes they were the greatest friends in the world, calling each other by their first names, and looking into the "room" occasionally in order to see that William Greig and the minister were still at their talks.

Yet so loyal was the little heart that, after having been round the farmyard to see, for the first time, that ever-fascinating array of hens, ducks, geese, turkeys, and other delightsome creatures, Ailie sought her way back to her grandfather's side and stood pa-

tiently with her hand upon his knee while he talked with William Greig.

There was a little room off the minister's, which had a door also from the passage. It was Jeannie's room, and it was arranged that little Ailie was to sleep there. So she went up and brought out of her pocket an old purse, a little crushed picture of a young girl set in a cheap round gilt frame, and a penny with a hole in it.

These she put as her household gods on the mantelpiece. Then she worshipped them for a little while, and so came down.

The farm of Nether Dullarg lay on the crest of the moors. There were green crofts about it, and the corn waved over them. It was a pleasant place up near to the sky with the fresh wind blowing over it, and the Loch of

Ken lying flashing down in a valley through which the airs always blew fresh and sweet.

Already the pale cheek of the little city girl seemed rosier. The minister and she went out to walk among the pleasant fields, and away over to the edge of the heather. They went hand-in-hand like two young things, for all the difference of years. The grasshoppers shrilled and leapt among the grasses. Ailie obtained an assurance from her grandfather that it was not warm where any of these sat down, and soon had half a dozen by her, which, however, escaped again almost as soon as she caught them.

"This *is* better than Richmond Park," said the little girl, eagerly.

So sitting on a tussock of heather with the purple moors all about, and

the great vacancy of the skies above, Gilbert Rutherford cautiously drew on the little girl to speak of her London home, and the love she bore to Bessie Upton.

As he did so, they played at "hard-heads," at which the minister rather fancied his skill in the choice of tough combatant specimens of that hardy vegetable.[1] But the little maid regularly beat him, for it soon appeared that she had been under the instruction of a veteran.

When he acknowledged defeat, she made light of it, saying only—

"You should play with Aunt Bessie. She is a one-er, *if* you like. You would not have a chance with her. I

[1] The game is simple and probably pre-historic. It consists in trying to behead your neighbour's "hard-head" with your own.

should like to see you. Oh, I wish she was here!'

Now Gilbert Rutherford had no very strict scruples himself. This little maid's talk was a solvent of suspicion and evil suggestion; but he thought to himself quietly what his session would have said had they seen him playing at "hard-heads" on the side of a wild moor with a play-actress from London. He did not smile at this, for it was not a subject to dwell upon, even in jest.

They continued to play, and Ailie continued the praises of Aunt Bessie, till to Gilbert Rutherford something rose clear in his mind—a purpose that came suddenly upon him. He was accustomed to having his future borne in upon him as though from without. He himself would have said that he was being led by a Higher Hand, and we

will not contradict him. But if so, Providence was broader-minded than a session of the Hill Kirk.

"That 's six of yours this one has cut the heads off," cried the blood-thirsty Amazon. "We shall call him 'Great-heart.'"

"Who told you about 'Great-heart'?" said the minister, with some little disappointment, for he had had it in his mind for the very next day to introduce this bright maiden to the wonders of the Tinker's Pilgrim.

Before he heard it, he knew what the answer would be. He was right.

"Did no one ever do anything but Aunt Bessie?" he said, with just a suspicion of peevishness in his tone, a change of accent at once discerned by little Ailie.

"No," she said, at once; "at least,

no really nice things. It was always Aunt Bessie who was kind to me. She reads to me every Sunday after church from the good Book, and after that from the story about 'Christian' and 'Greatheart.'"

Now, Dr. Rutherford had it as fixed in his mind as any other of the doctrines of his creed that no good thing could come out of the Nazareth of the theatre. So this unconscious testimony of righteousness existing within the evil precincts almost unsettled the bed-rock of his beliefs. He saw well that there were other universes to which he had not reached, in which some of the seven thousand dwelt, who had not bowed the knee to Baal, and whose lips had not kissed him.

Yet even now it passed belief that this play-actress lass should be good

according to the standard that he counted goodness—good as his own wife Ailie had been good. She might be kind, indeed. But good and a Christian—he could not believe it.

Also he could not disbelieve it.

He would go and see.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CITY OF GREAT BABYLON.

AUTUMN in London! Out of the innumerable heavens of night, Midsummer had fallen with his burning heats. By day the sun no longer oppressed the streets and squares, and made the night but a breathing space between two eternities of torment. Night was no longer dusty with hot, veering, choking winds. Crisp, chill, with an apt sense of new-washed, clear-starched, well-ordered cleanliness, the night of early October lay upon London.

Gilbert Rutherford, the Great Preacher, simple as a child, wise as an Eastern sage, came out of the murky

glooms and rumbling spaces of St. Clement's railway station. He had travelled directly from Scotland. His well-brushed, worn-surfaced black overcoat buttoned up to the chin, concealed his broad white neckcloth and the frock-coat of his daily existence.

The Great Preacher came as a child comes to London town. The Northern Capital, which he knew like the palm of his hand, is a commerceless, trafficless city—a Puritanic maid among cities. Her grey acreages and windy vistas of ash-bockets, about which the dogs prowl and slink at nights, told him little more of London than of the gem-clear, lucent cities which stud the broad Dutch lowlands of some unmapped Martian continent.

Five o'clock struck from the great clock of St. Clement's as Gilbert came

forth, walking fast and carrying his sixty years as a strong soldier carries his full campaigning kit—with a bright *élan* and *verve*, yet not as though the weight made no difference whatever to him.

The shrewd, chill air breathed damp upon him, and the indefinite yet keen smell of the city took him by the throat. There was an elation at his heart like that of a boy on his first holiday. A fear, too, that in what he looked upon as this great congestion of wonders and sins, there might come to him some combination of circumstances in which he, that had preached faithfulness to duty and the higher self so long, might not prove worthy of himself.

There was a plash of dawn drawn thwartwise across the end of an eastern

street, a luminous pearl-grey darkness warmed with an unseen fire—a foretaste of the gushing fountain of light which would gush up presently from behind the solemn majesty of St. Paul's.

"Good morning, sir!" said a policeman, sauntering up from the angle of a doorway from which he had been surveying this tall traveller, as he looked about him under the flickering fairy dance of yellow light and black shadow beneath the pavement lamps.

"Good morning, officer," said Gilbert. Then, with the open guilelessness and trust of a man accustomed to open his heart safely, he said: "I should be grateful to you if, of your own knowledge, you could direct me to a decent lodging."

The policeman, wearied with the

silence of his beat, welcomed the opportunity of talk. He looked Gilbert over dispassionately—a Scot—a Dissenting parson—a stranger without a spark of guile, without knowledge also, he saw, of the virtue of a tip. Yet Robert was an honest fellow, who, though he had no objection to a modest acknowledgment, would yet do his best without it.

"No lodging in this district for the likes of you, sir," said he. "Down by the Strand, that 's your lay. There 's hotels and lodgings there that 'll suit all purses and wishes, sir—them that 's good and them that 's bad, them that wants to pay a bob a night, and them as is good for a yellow boy."

"But can you direct me more particularly, officer?" said Gilbert, who wished, and that speedily, to have

some local habitation in this great city. "I do not wish to go to a hotel. A quiet lodging with respectable people and liberty to come and go, that is the most I want."

Robert opened his lamp, which shed upward a smell of hot tin, warm air, and rancid oil. He blew it out and shut it up again with a snap.

"In half an hour I 'll be off duty, and if you will wait, I don't mind going down with you myself. I have a sister that is a most respectable person, and I daresay that she would take you in."

Which, indeed, she was more than willing to do.

So Gilbert Rutherford, glad to stretch himself after the cramped night of travel, walked along at the side of the London policeman, and

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THE [illegible] SCHOOL,
FIRST [illegible] STS.

heard tales of burglars chased along the league-long roofs, of quivering and flaccid horrors found collapsed in ignoble heaps under dark arch-ways, of chase and scuffle in blind areas, of woman's shrieks ringing nightly from under the leaves within the great parks. It is not to be denied that Robert (Constable X509) magnified his office, and upon occasion, it may be, related as his own experiences what had befallen his brother officers.

And after each recital, interspersed with the shaking of shop doors and the fumbling with window catches, Robert said—

"And, Lor' bless you, sir, it 's not likely that a stranger should know anything about a city like this and all its wickedness!"

The Great Preacher felt this to be

true. It fitted his notion of Sodom and Gomorrah, and he hoped he would be out of it before the brimstone began.

It was drawing near the hour of police relief. Gilbert Rutherford was left by himself for a moment under a lamp-post which had a ludicrous wisp of dirty yellow streaming from it, whistling because the burner was bad and the pressure of gas increasing as the lights were put out with the coming of the morning. A smouchy boy, with a cap drawn over his ears, the neck of his jacket pulled high, passed with his hands deep in his pocket-holes, whistling shrilly the music-hall chant of the hour as he went. His breed was so unknown to Gilbert Rutherford that he would not have been surprised had he whistled the "Old Hundred"

instead of "Slapping Sal, the Pride of Shoreditch," with that absurd catch in the middle which had fascinated all London—at least, the London known to the early message boy.

The boy stopped in his imitation of Slapping Sal's skirt dance and looked at the tall form of the Great Preacher leaning against the lamp-post. He stopped and appeared to contemplate him with great admiration.

"Lor'," he said, "I wish my gal was here to see you. Hev ye took this job by the week? It's as good as Moore and Burgess!"

He affected great wonder.

Gilbert Rutherford looked at this London boy, the first of his race, with the eyes of a benignant and guileless seraph—a seraph in a rusty overcoat and carrying a black bag.

"My boy," he said, "are you going so early to your work?"

"I bet you, my covey!" said the boy, promptly, "my governor 'ud be jolly well left if I did not turn up bright and early. He 'd have to shut his shop an' go into a bloomin' liquidation, that 's what 'ee would. Why, he 'd never hook down his shutters if I were n't there to cheer 'im up."

This was true, for the message boy had as a first charge upon his time to take them down himself.

"Do you work to help your mother, my boy?" asked Gilbert Rutherford.

This dirty boy had a soul to be saved, and he loved him. But yet he deserved to be as carefully spoken to as an earl's son. This was the Great Preacher's politics.

"Work for mother—not much—not

if I knows it. She 's an old geezer!" said the boy, promptly. "She 'd cob every 'make' I took home. But she don't green me—'cause why, I don't go home! Work for mother! Not this here Enery Hirving. I works for to take my girl to the theaytre. We takes a bloomin' box at the Ly-cee-hem, and I feeds her on ginger-bread."

The boy was so intent on his "saucing of the old cove" that he did not hear Constable X509 step softly behind him. So that the broad palm of Robert's left hand applied to one side of his head might have fatally disturbed his equilibrium, had it not been for an immediate balance of power thoughtfully applied on the other by Robert's right.

"Lemme go, see—you—I 'll bust yer, now, I will!" cried the urchin,

wriggling violently; but as soon as he found himself in the hands of an officer his tune changed. "I ain't done nothin' —s'elp me, Bob. I'm working for Rigby and Softsides in the Euston Road—honest and reggilar. You come an' see!"

The policeman laughed and continued to dust the boy's ears.

"None of your sauce, young shaver. Be off to Rigby's. I'll look in on you some day. It's a reformatory next time I'm on the look for you, young man—as well as a right smart taste of the birchers."

The boy went off, and Gilbert Rutherford asked concerning him as the policeman and he continued to walk Strandward, down the solemn shabbiness and narrow squalor of Bow Street.

The policeman knew the boy, but

not his name. Indeed, he never gave the same one twice. He had been up for "petty" on two occasions, and, as X509 said, the next time he would certainly get five years in a reformatory, which would be the best thing in the world for him.

"Can nothing be done?" asked the Great Preacher, anxiously.

To him Tommy the boy represented the whole irresponsible, forlorn, unsanctified youth of London. He was the first fact which bore in upon him the undreamed-of difficulty of the problem he had come to this great Babylon city to solve. The idea that the city could contain within itself homes and loves and honest lives by the million had not yet broken upon him. It was yet to him "this great Babylon."

"Done!" said the policeman. "Why,

yes, of course. Mr. Vaughan will commit him to Crouch End, and he 'll get a smart swishing. That 'll be done. And willing, too ! "

" But nothing in the way of influence ? " said Gilbert, pityingly.

" Lor' bless ye," said X509, " like of him don't care a rap for influence. Last time he was up before the beak, it was sneaking wipes in a Sunday School. Bless you, 'e don't care. There 's 'alf a million, more or less, just like him in this city."

They walked on together. Behind them, through the chill silence of the morning, the smart, steady-falling *rap-rap rap-rap* of a horse's hoofs on the pavement pursued them. The hansom came nearer. Gilbert Rutherford instinctively went to the side of the narrow street. The policeman turned

to mark the driver and his number with professional caution. As the hansom came to the end of the narrow lane where they were, a great lumbering wagon, trailing country-ward from Convent Garden, stood still in its tracks, while the driver in a neighbouring house of call—where they sold hot morning coffee and rolls—set his nose in a beverage that was certainly not hot coffee.

At this delay the driver of the hansom launched in at the door a volley of blasphemies, as he checked his mare almost on her haunches, the sparks glinting forward diagonally from the pavement from her feet. The policeman turned with his hand palm outwards toward the driver of the hansom.

"Less o' that language," he said. "I 'll report you before the beak; and you have ladies inside!"

The driver snorted a contemptuous grunt.

"Ladies!" he said fleeringly, "there 's a power o' them ladies about."

The hansom was stopped for a moment as the great waggoner's dray was slowly moved out under a running fire of epithets and retorts.

Within it there were two people. One was a woman with very bright golden hair, and on her cheek a glow and colour that was neither the breath of morning nor the flush of innocence. Her light billowy dress escaped under the two-fold door. She lay asleep with her head on the shoulder of a younger woman—a girl dressed in a plain dark dress, with a small bonnet of brown and black, who looked straight forward with set face. She was very pale, and there were dark purple rims round her eyes.

Her eyes were downcast, and she saw nothing, as though buried in hopeless thought. She seemed to Gilbert Rutherford a virgin angel, swept out of the abode of bliss by some mistake into the crowd of Satan's rebels, yet for whom there was neither return nor any defilement.

The hansom drove away, whirling the pillowed golden head and the pale down-looking face out of his world into nothingness in that strange London way which is so fascinating and so sad.

But ere they went Gilbert Rutherford knew that on the very morning of his coming to that wide wilderness of London, he had seen her that had been the wife of his son, and was the mother of his treasure—the little lass who at that moment lay asleep in the bed of Alison Greig in the little low house out on the

wide, whaup-haunted moors, where a man may walk alone with himself, and a child with God.

Also he knew that by some rare, unthought-of-providence he had seen Bessie Upton.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. JOHN SPENCER, OF GODOWN AND CO., CHINA MERCHANTS.

DR. GILBERT RUTHERFORD entered upon his lodgings with contentment, and his landlady was an honest woman—according to her lights. She was honest with the rent, but she ate her lodger's butter. She gave him clean sheets once a week, and charged him two prices for his coal—which, indeed, he knew, was very dear in London. She lived in Essex Street, Strand, and her name was Cursitor.

Mrs. Cursitor was the sister of Constable X509, and had married late in life, when she was of full age to keep a husband. Her choice was

Mr. Augustus Cursitor, who had been looking for such an appointment for some time. It was enough to be the possessor of such a name, without having to work. Augustus had been what the Sunday Democratic weeklies (published on Wednesday) call a pampered menial—that is, a footman to the Lady Helena Rockhampton. This was a good berth, as these things go; but to be husband to Mrs. Cursitor was better. She had been cook at Lady Helena's, and had a tidy sum in bank to retire upon, besides her professional ability. So now Cursitor sat in a little room off the hall, in Essex Street, Strand, attired in a shooting-jacket with many pockets and light grey trousers. The shooting-jacket had a band round the waist, which Cursitor left loose for two

reasons—because Lord Rockhampton had it so, and because Mrs. Cursitor's dinners were excellent. Cursitor was under the belief that he was an admirable makeup for a lord, and his manner to Gilbert Rutherford was a compound of this belief and the natural contempt felt by one in his own position for a Dissenting Scotch preacher.

Gilbert Rutherford made his acquaintance later in the day in the dining-room, which besides was also every other kind of room except a bedroom. He found Cursitor there when he came down with a sheaf of papers and a book, kept together by a band of broad black elastic. Mrs. Cursitor had just mended the fire and gone out. Cursitor toasted his toes. He wore slippers without any

heel, but otherwise he was the perfect gentleman —as he often said himself.

"A fine day, sir," said the owner of the house to his guest.

He had meant to leave out the *sir*, but something in the manner of the minister, something large and natural, induced him to change his mind in spite of himself.

"A fine day indeed," said Dr. Rutherford, bowing. He made a picture as he stood by the window, with his fine grey hair falling back from his temples, his broad brow, and equable eyes still and calm in his head.

"From Scotland, sir?" said Mr. Cursitor.

"I do come from Scotland," said the preacher.

"A fine country, sir, I believe.

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How is bags this season? I did hear from a friend that they was running very light—disease among the birds. Ah, the old story!"

And Mr. Cursitor stretched himself largely and comprehensively.

"You refer to game," said Dr. Rutherford, smiling. "I fear I can give you little information. I believe that there are plenty of birds this year. At least," he added honestly, "I have seen many hanging in the poulterers' shops."

For which confession Mr. Cursitor thought less of his guest than ever.

He got up from the shabby lounging-chair and walked to the window, where he stood discontentedly with his hands in his pockets. The boarding-house was very empty, save for some young clerks who came in for

dinner, despatched a meal, and then vanished till the small hours.

The preacher sat down to his papers at the table. He looked up presently and said—

"Can you tell me whether we are far from the Siddons Theatre?"

Mr. Cursitor pointed with his finger across the street.

"That's the stage door," he said, succinctly.

Dr. Rutherford rose and looked at the place indicated with great attention. It was a plain door without anything remarkable about it, except that it was pointedly announced above that there was "no admittance," apparently not even on business, for the qualifying phrase was not mentioned. Its purpose as a door was therefore not apparent.

There were, nevertheless, people going in, but as far as Dr. Rutherford saw, none going out. Half a dozen girls in plain dresses entered, some from hansoms which came swinging round the corner of Essex Street, while others walked quietly up from the Temple station. A middle-aged woman or two passed in with supreme inattention. Now and then a man in no way distinguished from fifty others save for a certain ease of carriage and lightness of tread, flashed past and disappeared.

"That is the stage manager," said Mr. Cursitor. "He's a clever fellow. He makes the place. He stands no nonsense, I can tell you. You do your work, and you do it well; or there's no use for you, and to the door you go."

Mr. Cursitor knew. He had once been a "super" in a spectacle show, and "to the door had gone." Whereupon Mr. Cursitor proceeded to give copious details of the life of each member of the company of the Siddons Theatre. He saw that his visitor was interested, and he made the biographies both lively and spicy—as spice is understood in the halls of the gentleman-in-waiting. The minister heard more clearly than ever the roar of Babylon as Mr. Cursitor talked to him.

There was a great staring play-bill opposite, which declared that at the Siddons Theatre they were playing the most successful comedy of "Mayblossom." Further, this piece was now in its second week, and "standing room only" was out every night

before the curtain rose. Evidently the management was in high feather and afforded new placards very often. Indeed, they had imported for the occasion some marvellously impressive posters signed with a French name. Looking at these, one almost smelled the asphalte and the balmy clear air of Paris.

And this was the theatre of Bessie Upton. Here was the place where nightly the idol of his innocent maid acted stage plays for the delectation of pleasure-seekers. He had thought within himself what he should do. He must seek her there. Yet he would not spy upon the wickedness of the place or its strange inhabitants, who no doubt had their own laws and customs, and stood or fell to their Lord. So if he gave ear to the voice

of the charmer in the person of Mr. Cursitor, it was not with the ear of indiscriminate belief.

Dr. Gilbert Rutherford had, of course, been nurtured in an atmosphere of strong and robust faith, where it was an accepted fact, undisputed and undenied, that no good thing could come out of the Sodom and Gomorrah of the theatre. Yet there was his innocent little girl, with the dew of her youth upon her, utterly devoted to one who lived and worked in such an atmosphere. He was here to prove the matter, and if possible to rescue a brand from the burning. But he came in no superior righteousness, for he had learned in the land where he dwelt that every man and woman—good and bad, black, white, speckled, spotted, and ring-streaked—

can be influenced by sympathy and understanding, and by these alone.

Mr. Cursitor, who had views of his own upon life, and a profound disbelief in the goodness of humanity, based upon a long course of gentleman-in-waiting experience, seeing that his Scotch parson was interested in the theatre, introduced him at the hour of dinner to a young man of the name of Johnny (second name indistinct), whose acquaintance with all that concerned the stage was extensive and peculiar.

In five minutes Gilbert Rutherford and Johnny had arranged to go to the theatre together. Johnny was high up in Godown and Company's (China merchants, 3, Threadneedle Street, City). He was a brilliant young business man, whose fondness for the de-

tails of the Eastern trade during the day was balanced by an extreme devotion to the footlights in the evenings. This latter peculiarity, however, owing to the extremely serious opinions of Mr. Henry Godown—Johnny's immediate governor—was not alluded to during business hours.

Now Johnny, who signed Spencer during the day (or rather "*Godown and Company—J. S.*" in the neatest of tail flourishes beneath), was an exceedingly sound-hearted young fellow. He had seen many go wrong, whose heads were not strong enough to walk the path he was treading. Yet for himself he had kept straight. He had no very profound religious convictions, yet he spent an unhappy day when in the morning he omitted to say the prayer he had said since infancy. And

he was accustomed, also on the sly, to read a word or two out of the Bible his mother had given him. But Johnny let nobody suspect that he did this, for he was very reticent on such matters. His theatrical reputation was very great. It was well known in Threadneedle Street (outside the private room of Mr. Henry Godown) that the manager of the Middlesex never put a piece on the boards without consulting Johnny. This was to some extent true, but generally took the form of the manager saying—

"I 'll bet you a hat, Johnny, that this show does n't go!"

"Done!" Johnny would reply. "I bet a hat it goes like winking!"

Now, this frank confidence cheered the manager. He liked Johnny more than ever, for this conversation always

took place at a time when he had been thinking whether it would be better to skip for the Argentine, or try a shorter cut off the parapet of Waterloo Bridge. But Johnny was always confident at the nasty moments, and on this and other accounts he was the most popular person about the theatre. He had therefore store of new hats, and was altogether the glossiest and best-groomed young man in the office.

But for all that he lived upon his pay, and even sent some home to his mother, instead of leeching her for "fivers," as most youths were wont to do with their suffering relatives. He was not a young man to arrive at much harm, for his caution was highly developed. (His mother came from Annandale.) And though he heard every evening the chimes of midnight,

the bells of St. Clement's were not still before Johnny was upstairs in Mrs. Cursitor's second floor front, and—what he would have been mortally ashamed of had it been known—saying his prayers.

CHAPTER VIII.

JOHNNY SPENCER'S CHURCH ATTENDANCE.

IT was to Johnny that Dr. Gilbert Rutherford entrusted himself, in the character of an impartial observer come to note the manners and customs of the strange people of the world of "Make Believe" in this City of Babylon.

"Well," said Johnny, "they're none so bad, you know; and when you come to know them you see a good many tolerably decent streaks in the worst of them."

"But," said the Great Preacher, as he and Johnny Spencer sat by the fire alone, Mr. Cursitor reading the evening

papers in the little room off the hall. He was busy that night and could not be disturbed, for there was an excellent trial in high life, and the *Evening Scavenger* had more than ten columns of details. So they left him to enjoy the pleasures of literature. His wife always said that Augustus was a great student. "But," said Dr. Gilbert to his mentor, "I have understood that the most shameful wickedness took root and flourished in the theatre and about it."

He did not mean to be uncharitable. But such was his ancestral belief. It is also national.

"No doubt—no doubt," said Johnny, cheerfully; "things are pretty mixed there as elsewhere. There 's good and bad—a power of both. But mostly middling—'fair to middlin', as we say

in town, sir. There's a deal that is crooked, no doubt. But then, there is a big slice of straightness too, and the good Samaritan crops up perhaps oftener than elsewhere. There's thieves, no doubt. But when a poor fellow falls among them, there's always somebody happening along to set him on his own beast"—Johnny was shy about the reference, not being sure that he had got it by the right end—"with his twopence handy in his ticket pocket and all correct."

"That," said the old preacher, who understood these things, "covereth a multitude of sins."

"Well, yes," said Johnny Spencer; "it's the better for us if we do a trifle in that way. It may be just as well some day—I don't mean you, sir, but the like of us. I don't believe much in

that Priest-and-Levite, t'other-side-the-way business myself. My mother does n't either."

"You have a mother?" asked Gilbert Rutherford, gently.

"The properest old lady you ever saw," said Johnny, promptly, and without irreverence. Gilbert could see his eye brightening.

"I wish you could see her, sir. She was down last year—stayed here, and was a mother to the whole house in twenty-four hours—except that beast Cursitor," he added, with a flash of recollection.

"I should like to see her," said Gilbert.

"Perhaps you will, sir. She comes from Scotland—though you would never know it. I mean," said he, with crimsoning face, swiftly, "that she has

been so long here, you know, and she would give away every penny she 's got."

"And you do not think that a trait of the Scottish character?" queried Gilbert, sitting back in his chair. He was smiling to himself, while the young man manipulated his cigarette to cover his confusion.

"Oh, no, sir," said Johnny, "not at all; but you see——"

He paused, stammered, looked confused, and finally gave it up, laughing outright at himself.

"I 'd better own up, I guess. I made a miss of the biggest kind that time; but you know what I mean."

"Whom do you sit under in London?" said Gilbert, to give the youth time, and to change the subject.

"The which? I mean, I beg your

pardon!" said Johnny, with a vague uneasiness.

"I mean, which church do you attend regularly?"

This was worse than ever. Johnny wove his long legs uneasily, and dropped his cigarette.

"Well, sir, the truth is I have not been going anywhere quite regularly."

And Johnny wished heartily he had never begun to talk to the preacher—who was apparently only a common preacher after all, in spite of his open mind on some subjects. But that was a feeling which no one could long have with Gilbert Rutherford.

He put his hand on that of the young man gently.

"I daresay there is a good reason for that," he said, "and I have no right

to say a word. But I am old enough to be your father, you know."

"There is no particular reason," said Johnny Spencer, honestly, "why I don't go."

"Then," said Gilbert, "do you tell your mother that you go every night to the theatre, and never to church at all?"

"It 's a regular shame," said Johnny; "It 's not the right thing to play on the old lady, I know."

For a little moment there was silence between the two men, but not any more the silence of embarrassment. Then Johnny spoke again, forcing his words.

"It is not quite true to say that I don't go to church. I do go pretty often. But I fear you will think it worse than not going at all."

"And what takes you?" said Dr.

Rutherford, who grew to like this very frank young man.

"Just what takes me to the theatre —a nice girl," said Johnny.

The preacher said nothing, but his eyes looked into the young man's soul.

Johnny was neither abashed nor discouraged.

"She's an awfully decent girl, sir; and I'd smile if she was to walk over me in dirty boots. But she won't say a word to me. She goes to St. Aiden's, Kensington, every Sunday morning; and Johnny Spencer goes too—just to look at her. I like to sit behind her and see her pray. It's not right going to church——"

"I don't know that," said the Great Preacher. "I am often conscious that I go to church myself from very mixed motives."

Johnny Spencer stared.

"But not like this, sir," he said. "You see, sir, I go just to see this girl, and to have a chance of speaking to her when we come out."

The older man pressed the arm of his junior.

"I, too," he said, "have gone to church to see a good girl, and——"

But he got out not another word.

Johnny Spencer rose from his seat in great excitement.

"Have you indeed, sir? It is awfully kind of you to tell me that—I deserved to get a wigging instead."

Then Johnny was silent. Both the men stood up, on opposite sides of the mantelpiece, looking like father and son, save for the opposition of fashionable and unfashionable clothing.

"Where is she now?" said Johnny,

with a bashful and pretty hesitation. "That girl you went—to church—to see?"

"She is dead," said Gilbert, bowing his head. His voice was nearly a whisper.

Johnnie put up his hand to take off his hat, but finding no hat, he held his hand a moment aloft before dropping it.

"I am so sorry, sir," he said gently, and so fell silent.

"Tell me about this girl," said Gilbert Rutherford, looking up.

"Oh, there 's not much to tell. If I told you her name you would not know it. She is the best girl in London. She plays over there every evening. She will be passing in there in ten minutes—no, *nine*," he said, his watch in his hand.

"Is her name Bessie Upton?" said

Dr. Rutherford, a thought suddenly coming into his head.

The young man stared, taken with a great astonishment.

"Do *you* know Bessie Upton?" he asked.

"She is a relative of mine," said Gilbert, "and I have met her once."

"Great George!" exclaimed Johnny, "here 's luck. I 've been gassing like a silly fool to a stranger, and he turns out to be a relative of Bessie Upton. Now, you may as well understand, first as last—I 'm in love right down to my bottom dollar, and she knows it. But she won't look at me," said the young man, sadly.

"It does not seem to affect you much," said the other.

Johnny laughed.

"Well, you see," he said, "the way

of that is this. Bessie won't hear a word from me, it 's true. But then she lets me walk a little bit with her every Sunday after church, just round the park before she goes home, and though there 's not a grain of love in the matter on her side—that 's a good deal for her to give, you know. And then," said Johnny, with a satisfied sigh, "there 's no other chap gets as much as a look, or comes within a sea mile of taking her round the park."

Now that he was started on his hobby he would have gone on forever. He began restlessly pacing up and down, looking at his watch about four times in the minute. Gilbert Rutherford watched him with a certain grave sympathy. It took him back thirty-five years to the days when he, a prim divinity student, waited for Ailie.

But this was only a reckless young fellow who did not go to church, waiting to see a play-actress pass in at a stage door. Why did he not reprove him and cover him with shame? Was he not shaming his position and testimony?

He thought not. But had he been asked why, he could not for the life of him have given any better answer than that this was Johnny Spencer (of whose existence he had never heard two hours before) waiting to see Bessie Upton go by to her work.

Which was, of course, an entirely insufficient reason, and, indeed, wholly beside the question.

"Here they come. Put down that confounded gas!" cried Johnny, hastily, in a loud whisper. "Beg your pardon —I did not mean that. I forgot for

the moment that you were not one of the fellows."

"Do not mind," said the Great Preacher, who knew a man, and did not judge by the sound of words.

A young girl came down the narrow street rapidly, wrapped in a cloak. A stout, healthy-looking countrywoman followed her. Gilbert settled in his mind that this was the Aunt Rebecca of whom Ailie spoke.

They entered the door without looking round, and then Johnny Spencer drew a great breath and looked round at the minister.

"That 's the little girl," he said. "She 's a daisy, I 'm telling you. There 's nothing the matter with Bessie Upton, except that she won't have yours truly, Johnny Spencer! Barkis is mighty willing—but Bessie she says no. It 's

the hardest case," pursued the young man. "I do believe I 'd have a very good chance if it was n't for her wretch of a sister. She 's a bad lot; but after all—what right have I to talk about her? Bessie thinks that if she were to leave her it would be all up. And so no doubt it would. And a good job too! But for that girl to throw herself away for the sake of a piece like that, it drives me wild, I tell you."

The minister sat down and listened, bending his slender finger-tips together and frowning at the fire. Johnny Spencer tramped vigorously about till Mrs. Cursitor looked in, anxious for her carpets.

"I wish, Mr. John," she said, "as how you would either get out o' love or get married—one of the two. It 's a new carpet every six months with

you trampin' up and down that there dinin'-room afore them windows."

"Sorry, Mrs. Cursitor, blessed sorry —forgot again," cried Johnny, sitting down penitently. "I won't forget any more—honour!"

"Ah, Master John, it 's not that I doesn't feel for you, but we are poor hardworkin' folks, Mr. Cursitor an' me —and folks that has rooms in the Bank of England, with piles of sovereigns round about them—and help yourself—don't know the struggles of the poor."

"Now, be off with your blarney; Cursitor and you are mighty well off. Neither of you have seen your heels for the last fifteen years to my knowledge, and you feed on the fat of the land," retorted Johnny. "It 's us poor chaps that get the scrap ends."

"Don't believe him, sir," said the

landlady to Gilbert Rutherford. "He is a lad for jokes. It is nothing but the best that the boarders will have, as you shall experience if you do us the honour to remain under our 'umble roof."

"As long as you have thirty bob a week, Mrs. Cursitor is your friend till death, sir!" said Johnny, so that that lady might have the benefit of the remark as she went out of the door.

CHAPTER IX.

TOMMY THE BOY.

HALF an hour after they crossed the road to the Siddons Theatre, and looked in at the stage door, but saw nothing through that gateway of marvels save a long draughty passage and a box with a wicket gate in it.

There was a strong blow of gassy air in their faces as they strode along through empty halls and down stairs which echoed as they went.

"Let's go to the pit," said Johnny. "Best place in the house—none of your upper circle, and the Amphi' cads guying you over the railings. Now, in the pit there's only the off-chance of

orange peel from the gallery, and that you may get even in the stalls."

They were soon shouldering gently in a little good-humoured press before a double door, both halves of which were closed. Dr. Gilbert Rutherford was within the precincts of a theatre for the first time in his life. As he stood there he had an uneasy sense of what might happen if by chance some one recognised him. He felt the hand of Duncan Mac Gill, his ruling elder, on his shoulder every time the crowd pressed upon him in that narrow, cold, stone-vaulted place. Presently the doors opened inward, and the little knot of pitites, eager for the best seats, scurried in, treading on each other's heels in their eagerness to get good places.

It was with a sense of chill at his heart like incipient rigor that Gilbert

Rutherford passed into the wide, brilliantly lighted spaces of the theatre. He breathed a prayer as he went for forgiveness if the action should after all chance to be wrong. For by his creed the end in no case sanctified the means.

"And this is the pit?" he said tentatively, to Johnny Spencer when they were seated. The tiered theatre seemed to rise indefinitely above him, flashing gold and salmon colour. It took his breath to look upward. He heard the gallery tumbling turbulently in like a reservoir that has burst its dam. Then came whistling and cat-calls from aloft. A gentleman in a glossy hat came for a moment through a side door into the stalls.

"That 's the manager, Joe Jefferies," said Johnny, "a friend of mine. He is a decent fellow. But Rose Sargeant,

the star, my word, she is a trouble to him. She wears his life out with her headaches and her letters to say that she can 't come. I guess he 's had one to-night. That 's why he 's so grey about the temples. He 's not a day older than I, and he 's crow-footed all over the place already, as you can see from here, sir."

"What does Miss Upton play?" said Dr. Gilbert Rutherford.

"Oh," said Johnny, "there 's the bill, you 'll see—the usual thing."

The minister took the fluttering pink sheet with a great many unnecessary advertisements upon it, and a little rivulet of names running down through the compartments of the advertisements.

He could make nothing of it. One name he caught. In smaller letters

under the leaded Clarendon which declared that Miss Rose Sargeant played the heroine, was the modest announcement that the part of Lucy Brandon was to be undertaken by Miss Grace St. Vincent.

"I fear I can make nothing of this," Gilbert said, gently, to Johnny.

"No?" said that youth, interrogatively and cheerfully. He was quite willing to devote some time to explanation—even anxious. "Well, Bessie is not a star, you see, and so she has to put up with the star. She plays second lady, and plays it like an angel. Also, she has to understudy Rose Sargeant and play her parts when that lady's temper is out of order and she wants to take it out of the manager."

"I understand," said the minister, who did—partially.

"Bessie will never be a great actress," Johnny went on. "She has got too much character of her own. At least I think so. She forgets herself all right, and makes you make a fool of yourself —cry, you know—when things get in a hole, and she comes on with a muslin pocket handkerchief in her hand and her hair down. But for all that Bessie will never make a great actress. Though don't you tell her I said so," continued Johnny, anxiously. "If you did, I should be in a hat. For I have to tell her quite different when we walk round the park. She talks to me a lot about her Art, you see, and I have to play up!" the ingenuous youth explained.

The play that night was elaborately naught. And, indeed, the Great Preacher did not make even an attempt to understand it. There was but one figure for

him in it—the pale-faced girl who was made the sacrifice in order that the star might climb to the well-ordered triumph of the final scene—with the limelight man following her about with his lens as well as he could and (owing to two goes of gin between the third and fourth acts) generally missing her by about two feet, and glorifying irregularly the pale golden hair of Bessie Upton.

Johnny Spencer clapped his knee with his hand when this happened the second time.

"The star will have hysterics, the manager get fits, and the limelight man the sack!" said Johnny, delightedly, explaining the situation in his tersely vivid manner.

But though Johnny Spencer continued to explain till they parted at their bedroom door, Gilbert Rutherford

could not understand all that was involved in that comprehensive sentence, nor why these things were so.

The next day passed slowly. Dr. Rutherford went to the British Museum and saw a Spanish Polyglot which was his envy. Also he saw a very famous Bible which he was only allowed to behold by manifesting a knowledge of the original tongues to an assistant librarian—who mentioned to the chief of the department of Chaldæic languages that there was a Scotch scholar in the reading-room asking for many sorts of unheard of things. The specialist went and found Dr. Gilbert at work on a sheet of his pet emendations, which had been left between the leaves of a Syriac text.

"Will you come into my room?" said the specialist, and without a word

led the minister away, motioning the assistant to bring in the big books. But Gilbert Rutherford carried most of them himself.

Presently from within that room there came the sounds of wordy strife, a war of giants. And for a little, in the delight of battle with his peers, Gilbert Rutherford forgot even Bessie Upton.

But not for long. Some turn of a sentence reminded him of the little girl he had left so far in the north, and with some earnest words of thanks, and an invitation to come and have it out another day, Gilbert Rutherford found himself again speeding Strandward.

He had not gone far when he was aware of a small boy walking by his side and looking upward to attract his

attention. It was his friend of the morning of his arrival, alert and self-possessed as ever.

"Good morning, sir," he said. "Got loose from that lamp-post? And how do you find yourself—pretty frisky, eh? Been doin' a mash on a mummy?"

The irrepressible youth pointed his finger at the great gloomy pile of the Museum, from the façade of which they were receding.

"Ah, my boy," said Dr. Rutherford, "I remember you now. How is it that you are here? Why are you not at work?"

"Ah," said the gamin, with some slight suspicion of the preacher's own manner, "I resignated my sitooation —told old Softsides to take down the shutters 'isself and do his own sweepin'.

In fact, I dismissed my master, got promoted on to the street, and here I am!"

Gilbert looked grave.

"Do you mean that you have had a quarrel with your masters?" said he. "I am sorry. Let us go back and see if nothing can be done."

Where he came from, man and boy took a situation as solemnly as they joined a church, and that was in most cases for life.

But the boy did not seem anxious to go back.

"I believe not, an' thank 'ee kindly," said the message-boy *emeritus*. "You see, when I resignated there was times. There were also some language, and things said as can't be unsaid. See here," he said, showing a coat collar nearly torn from the shoulder, "that 's what 'ee did."

"Who?" said the doctor, examining the rent carefully and conscientiously.

"Why, old Softsides, in course; but I guess there 's blue places all over *'im.* I wonder if he 's got through changing his trousies by now?" the message-boy continued meditatively. "My eye, wot a proper circus it was for about five minutes! There we had it ground an' lofty, with all the shop assistants waitin' for a grab, an' all their young ladies a-holdin' of them back an' a reglar crowd round the door. Gracious Polly, it was proper. I downed 'im, too, and that frequent, till that beast Rogers, the porter, nabbed me from the back, run me out and bounced me off the top step like a cat off'n a roof. I 'll cheese Rogers for that, you see! What call had he to stick in his motty? It was n't his day off that I knows on."

"My boy," began Gilbert Rutherford, "you ought not to speak in that way of any one. I fear you are vindictive. But you have lost your situation, and I am sorry for that. What are you going to do?"

"Sell matches and sleep in the dark arches—no twopenny dosses for Tommy the boy!"

"How much money have you?" said Gilbert.

"Three bob—*and* a tanner!" said the boy, cheerfully. There 's five bob of wages due me back at the shop on Euston Road."

"Let us go back and get it," said Gilbert, who in his national capacity never saw any good come of wasting money.

"I had rather not," said Tommy the boy.

"And why not?" asked the minister.

Tommy hesitated.

"Well, you see, sir, I knew as how old Softsides would never give me the money, and so before I comed away I plunked a stone through his plate-glass front, and so got straight."

"But, my boy, that was very wicked," said Gilbert Rutherford.

"No indeed, sir. You see, it was n't insured. I heard him bully-ragging a gent from the plate-glass insurance wot called larst week. 'EE did n't go for to want any of his bloomin' window hinsurances. 'EE could look after his own windows, 'EE could, and wot were the p'leece for, 'EE would like to know.' No, my heye," cried Tommy the boy, delightedly, "'ee have got hinformation on all them pints this day, or my name ain't Buffalo Bill, the Per-ride o' the Per-rairies."

In somewhat sober thought the preacher walked on by the side of the ragged urchin. His good sense told him that he should call a policeman; but he looked at the lad—ragged, good-humoured, and bright—and remembered that he would get, in the words of P. C. X509, a birching and five years in a reformatory. He was of opinion that though this might come, there was no need that it should come through him.

"Tommy," he said, "would you like to show me all about London till I go away?"

"I bet you!" said Tommy, confidently, "there ain't nothing in this little old village I don't know."

"But mind," said Gilbert, "no fighting, and do as you are bid."

"Honour bright! I'll not as much as heave a brick at a bobby."

"The boy has never had a chance," said Gilbert, as he led the way into a clothing store where there were ticketed second-hand jackets hanging in the door-way.

"Wot for do you go to give a cove like me that you meets on the street a rig hout like this?" said Tommy, very seriously, when they came out. "I might cut and run."

"You might, Tommy, of course; but I know you won't!" said Gilbert, diplomatically.

"No, indeed, that I won't!" said Tommy, manfully.

"I don't know about where you are to live," said the preacher. "I am living in Essex Street, Strand. How

am I to let you know when I want you?"

Tommy the boy had no difficulty.

"I know that ere stage-door keeper at the Siddons," he said. "'Ee 'll let me sleep in the cubby-hole at the back of his box, I know."

And so it was arranged. During the day Tommy was to be at the service of the minister to take him about the city, and in the evening, unless by special arrangement, both were to be free to go their own ways.

Something exceptional kept Johnny Spencer in the service of Messrs. Godown and Company past his usual time that evening, so that the time when Bessie Upton passed in at the stage door drew near, and Gilbert Rutherford waxed anxious. He went many times to the window and looked

up and down the street, so much so that Mrs. Cursitor, hearing him tramping, looked in upon him with a countenance of high anger, thinking that Johnny had come home wanting dinner after regular hours—the greatest crime in the Cursitor decalogue.

When she saw that it was the Scotch clergyman, she looked at him as much as to say that he at least was old enough to know better, and vanished as suddenly as she came.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNREHEARSED SCENE AT THE SIDDONS THEATRE.

PRESENTLY Gilbert put on his hat and crossed the road quickly. He found himself at the stage door in a moment—indeed before he was aware. He looked about vaguely for somebody to speak to, but saw no one. He became possessed with a great idea. He would go in at once and find Bessie Upton. He was proceeding along the stone passage when a voice cried to him from parts unknown.

"Hello! where are you going that way?"

Gilbert turned, and out of a small door a man came. As soon as he saw Gilbert, he said—

"Oh, tracts for the company. Leave them with me. I 'm out of pipe-lights any way. Them last was first-class."

"I wish to see Miss Upton," said Gilbert, politely.

"I daresay," answered the man, curtly. "You 're not the only one."

"But I must see her," said Gilbert. "I have come from Scotland to see her."

Like an imp shot up from the ground, Tommy the boy appeared, and thrusting himself between the two men, he said—

"This here is the gentleman that rigged me out, and gave me a chance, not knowing me from the Prince of Wales. 'Ee 's all right."

The porter accepted the introduction.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said. "You see, orders is orders, an' we have

such a many that tries to sneak in—gracious knows what to see."

"That is quite right," said Gilbert Rutherford, who could appreciate obedience to orders.

So in a trice, upon explaining his wishes, which did not sound very reasonable when put in cold words, Gilbert found himself in possession of a recess from which he could see the company arriving. They were a merry, light-hearted set—like a company after a run of a hundred nights when the leading ladies are to get each a new set of costumes.

They talked briskly among themselves, and that specially loud when the manager came round, in the hope that he might chance to hear their aspirations to play some better part.

In a little while Bessie Upton glided

past him very quietly, with Aunt Rebecca trudging sturdily behind her. Aunt Rebecca was also a dresser, and so helped the family finances in that way as well. Gilbert noticed that the men of the company lifted their hats to Bessie Upton with respect, but there was no general greeting, loud and hearty for her, such as they gave to some of the other ladies who came dimpling and sparkling in to their work. Yet altogether Gilbert was struck with the absence of what he had always supposed to be the natural ingredients of luxury and revelry in this private view of the world behind the scenes. There was a certain purposefulness about the whole. They seemed a set of rather quiet, hard-working people —save for one or two loud-voiced juniors who pushed their hats a good

deal back from their brows, and wore their hands very much in their pockets.

Bessie was standing taking off her gloves and speaking to Aunt Rebecca, when Gilbert Rutherford stepped out and went towards her.

The hum of the company's talk dropped instantly. All turned to look at him. His tall, spare, ascetic form clad in black, and his venerable and striking head thrown back, gave him a certain dignity and nobility which were not without their influence on eyes accustomed to note a dramatic effect.

"What a capital make-up!" said one.

"Quite in the style of 'The Quaker's Daughter,' said another.

"No, 'The Vicar of Wakefield'—from Scotland," whispered a third, whose vision was clearer, or who had

seen something like this when on tour north of the Tweed.

He had come close to Bessie Upton, and was holding out his hand before she saw him.

She gave a little sharp cry and stood very still, pressing a hand against her side as though she had a pain there. Yet she neither screamed nor fainted.

The company watched, for they quite appreciated the dramatic possibilities of the scene. But they were disappointed.

"Miss Upton," said Gilbert, with such childlike kindness and unaffected sympathy in his tone, that Bessie's heart stilled and her eyes filled like a lost child at the sound of a kind voice, "I have no right to intrude on you here; but I was in London and I thought you would like to know concerning Ailie——"

He paused, for Bessie's eyes were brimming to the overflow.

"Yes," she said breathlessly, "yes ——"

And so waited for him to proceed.

"She is the dearest little lass," said Gilbert, "and the best. I have her running wild about a farmhouse on the moors, with kind people whom I have known all my life. She is getting browner and more healthy every day."

Bessie Upton looked out of her wet eyes as if she were going to speak, but the words ebbed away again and she still stood silent.

At last she said—

"Has—has she forgotten me?"

That was the fear in her heart which would speak out.

"Forgotten you! No," said Gilbert, kindly. "On the contrary, we hear

of nothing the day by the length but of Aunt Bessie. She speaks of you all day and dreams of you all night. She calls for you in her sleep, and when she wakes she asks if this is the day when Aunt Bessie is coming. I have come to ask when is that day to be?"

He was speaking low, so that no one but Bessie could hear. Then she gave a quick little sob, which was caught by one or two of the company, who turned their backs and talked louder.

Aunt Rebecca also heard it, and she came up looking in no very friendly way at Gilbert.

"What is it, my dear?" she said, ruffling her feathers and looking as threatening as a brood-hen when the hawk hangs motionless in the sky.

"It is nothing, aunt," said Bessie. This is Ailie's grandfather."

The old lady looked him over.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance," she said. "I nursed the little darling—and a sweet child she was."

At this moment there was the noise of a great disturbance at the door—a woman's voice, rising above all, shrill and minatory. These other two women, Bessie and Aunt Rebecca, looked at each other. Bessie turned pale to the lips and ran towards the noise. Gilbert Rutherford followed. Most of the company were there already.

Two men, of whom one was the porter, were trying to hold a furious, struggling woman. She was yelling curses. Her hair had fallen, very bright yellow, about her shoulders. There was a look of demoniac possession on her face. As Gilbert came forward she broke

loose from the men and dashed among the thick of the company.

"Out of my way, you hussy!" she cried to Bessie Upton, who stood straight before her. "I came to see the manager—the hound, and I'll not leave this place until I find him. You put me off the boards, the two of you together. You know you did. You keep me from my rights, you and he. You never give me a shilling of your money, and you let me make none of my own. You would chain me in a dark room if you could. You inhuman wretch—call yourself a sister. Who took my child from me and had her hidden away, just when she might have begun to earn me something? You have her hidden here somewhere among you—you pack of robbers and child-stealers! Ah—I hate you all—all!"

Bessie and Aunt Rebecca closed upon the wild woman, but she shook them off and leaped back, flashing a knife in a way learned only on the stage.

"Come near me at your peril, any one of you!" she shouted, like a furious tigress at bay. Thus for a long moment the drug-maddened woman stood with her back against a woodland scene of utmost peace.

The manager and the stage-manager came flying from opposite directions.

The stage-manager cried "Hush" instinctively as he came, and the manager called out—

"Less noise there—they can hear you in front."

But as they came in sight of the group round the woman with the knife, they stopped abruptly. Through the throng Gilbert Rutherford pushed his

way. He walked straight up to the woman. The blade flashed to fall.

"My daughter," he said," give me the knife."

At the height of her passion the woman hesitated, struck dumb in the midst of her wild crying and fury.

Her eyes glared upon the minister as though they would kill him where he stood. Her lips moved, but no sound issued.

He held out his hand.

"I am Willie Rutherford's father," he said, "the grandfather of your little child, Ailie. She is quite safe, and prays for you night and morning."

The knife fell ringing on the floor. The woman lifted her arms up in a kind of appeal to a dumb heaven, and crying "My Ailie," she fell prone at his feet.

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They carried her to a cab and drove her home, Aunt Rebecca and Gilbert being with her inside, with Tommy the boy folding his arms tight under his chin, sitting on the box beside the cabby, and trying his hardest to look like a tiger.

They had a bad night at the Siddons that night. Three scene-shifters were drunk, Bessie Upton did not play well, and the star had one of her worst tantrums. The manager was, to say the least of it, disturbed; and at the close of a scene, when Bessie had been more absent-minded than ever, he approached her and said—

"Miss Upton, you are a good enough girl, and I have nothing to say against you. But I can't have any more of these scenes. To-night's was just one too many—gets the place a bad name.

I shall not need your services at the Siddons after the run of this piece. Besides, you have been playing for some time without thinking about your part."

He was sorry for this an hour after, but it was too late; the words were said. Bessie, perfectly calm, bowed and said—

"Thank you, Mr. Jefferies; you have been far too kind to me!"

And immediately the astonished manager found himself shaking hands with one of the steadiest members of his company, a queer dryness about his throat. He called himself a fool, and went directly and gave much better than he got to the star, till that very high-strung lady flung herself in a pet upon a sofa and dissolved into a passion of tears. Thereafter he looked up

routes for the Argentine Republic, and only decided to remain in London because these were not to be found in the A. B. C. Guide.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PLAY-ACTRESS TEACHES THE GREAT PREACHER.

GILBERT RUTHERFORD left his son's wife at her home in Vale Street, Kensington, under the care of Aunt Rebecca. They had not the least difficulty in taking her home in a cab. After the intense excitement of her condition at the theatre, a state of partial coma supervened —no doubt owing to the action of the drug from the effects of which she still suffered. The house was quite an ordinary one in a maze of dull, ashen-grey side streets down which the straws from the Earl's Court Road forever blew. In the brief moments which Gilbert spent within it, he noted in the

lower public rooms an extraordinary richness of decoration and furnishing, together with an inexplicable disorder. The carpets were of the finest, but hashed and spotted. One of the great marble ornaments on the mantelpiece was broken through the middle. There was a broken globe on the chandelier, and thrown into one corner, a battered doll. Gilbert Rutherford took this last in his hands. He was sure that in this most unfriendly dwelling, here at least was something the history of which he knew. It was one of Ailie's dolls. He set it upon the sideboard, but finding it near a tray of stale cigar-ends mixed with matches, he took it up again and thrust it into his coat pocket.

Thus he left the house in Vale Street, Earl's Court, with property feloniously acquired in his possession. This was

but one step lower in the downward course of the Great Preacher. It began with "Katie Bairdie had a coo," and it was not ended yet. There were yet lower depths.

The cab had been dismissed, and Gilbert set off to walk back to the Strand, that his brain might cool in the night air after the excitement of the last hours.

Tommy the boy trotted alongside, and furnished piquant details of the life of the inhabitants of the district, with the unholy wisdom of his years. They had not passed out of the Earl's Court Road when Bessie Upton met them, hurrying homeward from the theatre. She had come by the suburban railway to Gloucester Road.

There was a great sadness in the heart of Gilbert Rutherford for this

girl. She took him gratefully by the hand, but evidently wished to pass on as quickly as possible to that sad home out of which they had just come. But Gilbert said—

"My lassie, I have come all the way from Scotland to speak with you. Will you not be pleased to walk with me a little?"

And he offered her his arm with the courtly grace of an older time. They walked together in silence through the quiet, formal streets, in many of which there was not a soul to be seen, except the stray occasional policeman and a small boy trotting unobtrusively a hundred yards behind them.

"Aunt Bessie," said Gilbert, instinctively taking his strongest weapon in hand at the first word, "you cannot leave us all by ourselves in Scotland.

There is a home for you with us. My dear old sister will love you like a daughter. She writes to me an eager welcome for you and little Ailie together. I had two daughters once just like you, but laid them away with God. Will you come to take their place? It is a quiet place, I know, but we would make it very happy for you and full of love."

The poor, driven girl trembled on his arm.

He felt his advantage.

"Come away," he said, "away at once. Leave this terrible strain, of which I have seen something to-night. It is killing you. And come to help me to make a good woman of our little Ailie, who is waiting for you, and crying out for 'Aunt Bessie' when she wakens in the night."

Bessie Upton heard that cry as though she had been at the farm-house on the moors, and her heart was water within her. So Gilbert Rutherford pursued his advantage.

"See," he said, "how easy. Out of port at night, and soon the land will be left behind. We will come in the morning to a new land of peace. The old will be no more. Bring the good Rebecca, too, of whom Ailie has often spoken to me, and there will not be so happy a home as ours in all Scotland."

Bessie Upton dropped his arm.

"And Elsa?" she said.

"Elsa?" said Gilbert Rutherford, without understanding.

"And what of Elsa, my sister, whom my mother gave into my hands to care for when she died?"

There fell a silence between them.

"Your son's wife, Elsa!" she repeated, as if to herself.

Gilbert Rutherford forced himself to say, against his heart and conscience, "You must think of yourself. Such persecution as I have seen to-night, and heard hinted at before in the innocent prattle of little Ailie, ought not to be borne. You owe it to yourself and Ailie to come away from the dangers and the sins of this life."

Bessie Upton made a strange answer to the Great Preacher, who had now utterly forgotten that he had ever been called great. And, indeed, this last sermon of his was not worthy of him either in exposition or application.

"*Is that your own message or your Master's?*" said the play-actress.

The minister stood rebuked. This

girl from among the play-actors was teaching him the charity of Jesus. She went on—

"Can Elsa cease to be my sister? Can I forget my mother's dying charge? Can I take her child from her, as I have done, and leave her utterly alone, as the Book says,—without God and without hope in the world'?"

"Can you tell me more about your sister?" said Gilbert Rutherford, with infinite gentleness.

"God forbid that I should speak any evil of my sister!" said Bessie. "You have seen her to-night. But she is not always like that. For weeks she will be quiet as a lamb, till the fit takes her, and then she is as you saw."

The Great Preacher listened and felt in his soul that the girl was right,

though his reason fought against the conclusion. It was manifestly unfair that a true life should be sacrificed to one so stained by frailty and sin. Yet what of Jesus, whom for years he had preached? The searching question, "Is that your own message or your Master's?" utterly silenced him. He had no right to pull the last prop from under a falling house.

He walked to the door with the play-actress, and, taking her by the hand, said, with a certain solemnity, quaint and tender—

"My lassie, I that have called myself a servant of God all my days have learned my Master's spirit from you to-night. The God of Jacob be to you a very present help in time of trouble."

The words came like a benediction, and Bessie Upton bowed her head and went within with a hope in her heart such as had not been there for years.

CHAPTER XII.

JOHNNY SPENCER TURNS UP HIS CUFFS.

THE next day at evening found Gilbert Rutherford back at the house in dingy Vale Street. It was blazing with light. A hansom with a coronet on the panel stood at the door. Another, with or without the coronet, had just driven away. The maid-servant who opened the door had been unseen the night before. She had no difficulty in permitting Gilbert Rutherford to enter.

She said "Mrs. Lester Rutherford receives!" before he had uttered his murmur of inquiry.

In a moment he found himself in the brilliantly lighted room where the frayed velvet was and the other things. There were a number of men within, all making a great noise. The room was thick with cigar smoke, and the atmosphere feverish and hot. Glasses were clinking and silver flashing. She that had been his son's wife sat at the head of the table. She had shining red-gold hair, which curled in knots about her forehead, and was in magnificent attire. She talked to half a dozen men at once, who each tried to attract her attention.

There was a chair at the table end, and Gilbert Rutherford dropped into it without having attracted any notice.

He looked about him. Mrs. Lester Rutherford was in evening dress, and at intervals she lifted a pair of glasses

mounted upon a stick to her eyes and looked haughtily down the table.

There was a foolish youth with a rabbit mouth next to her. Then came a crowd of men in evening dress, undistinguishable to Gilbert Rutherford as sheep of a flock. At the further side of the table his eye caught that of Johnny Spencer, who nodded to him and motioned to him with his hand to keep his seat.

Presently My Lord of the Rabbit Mouth caught sight of Gilbert Rutherford. He gazed at him with an air of bewilderment. Then he caught furtively at his eye-glass, fixed it in his eye, and looked at the minister.

"Ah," he said aloud, "we have the clergy at table. Who may our venerable friend be?"

"A friend of my sister's," said

Mrs. Lester Rutherford, without looking at him.

Yet she had seen him enter, and remembered who he was.

"That pretty saint!" said my Lord. "The parson knows what he is about."

Johnny Spencer's eye flashed, but he said nothing.

The noble lord rapped on the table. There was a partial silence. Those who had been the loudest turned and called to the peer to ask what he was making that noise for.

"We have made a mistake, brethren," he went on, in a whining voice; "this is a prayer meeting. I call upon Brother Stiggins to engage in prayer. He is a friend of Miss Grace St. Vincent, late of the Siddons Theatre."

Some of the men laughed—those

who were in the train of my lord. Others, and they the most, looked about them as if ashamed, and moved uneasily.

Several cried, "Shut up, Heronshaw! Take him home, somebody!"

But the hereditary legislator went on. It was not often he got upon what he was pleased to call a joke. When he did he rode it hard. He brimmed a glass and sprang to his feet.

"To the health of Brother Stiggins and Miss St. Vincent!" he said.

Some of the men still laughed, but fewer. More sat silent, and two at least tried to pull Lord Heronshaw down into his chair. One only was on his feet. It was Johnny Spencer. He was turning back his cuffs in a professional manner.

My Lord was too excited to notice him.

"I say—glasses round—no heel taps. To the good health of Miss Grace——"

But, at this moment his glass went spinning out of his hand and crashed against the wall. The clean-built figure of Johnny Spencer stood before him.

"Stand out!" said Johnny, promptly. "Where will you have it? I'll teach you to insult a innocent, absent woman."

My Lord gasped, but having good blood in him somewhere, he did as he was told. He placed himself in some kind of posture of defence. One or two of his friends sprang to his assistance. But some of the quiet men who had looked most ashamed stood up and set their elbows before them.

"Are you ready?" cried Johnny. "*One*!"

My Lord found himself on his back, and the crowd rushed to lift him up. Before he could rise, Johnny Spencer had him by the collar and ran him swiftly to the door. The coroneted hansom stood there. Johnny had the peer within it in three bumps.

"Drive my Lord home as fast as you can. Take no orders from him till you get him there."

The coachman touched his hat. He was used to strange directions like this.

Johnny sprang up the steps again and was in the room in a moment. Most of the men were going out.

"Back!" cried Johnny, putting his own stalwart frame to the door. "There is something you should hear."

And Johnny Spencer, that fine young London Hercules, squared his shoulders and stood on guard.

He nodded to Dr. Gilbert Rutherford.

"Now, go on—speak to them!" he said.

For the first time during this scene of excitement, Dr. Gilbert Rutherford rose. His face was colourless and rigid as marble. His white hair fell away from his brow. Then he spoke to all who were there quietly and gently. Mrs. Lester Rutherford watched him with the same stilled and fascinated look with which she had regarded him in the theatre the night before. Her hand shook as she leaned on it, and on her right temple a nerve twitched visibly.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am an old man, so old that I might be the

father of any one in this room. You will permit me to speak to you. I had a son, dear to me as my own soul. He is dead. This is his wife."

He extended his hand towards Mrs. Lester Rutherford, who dropped her quizzing glass with a crash on the floor. The men were all looking down or standing sidelong round the room with their faces turned away. Only Johnny folded his arms and kept his back to the door.

"He was my last son—the latest left of all my children. He parted from me in anger for this woman's sake. I never saw him more. They laid him heart-broken in his grave—very far away—*because of this woman.*"

Mrs. Rutherford gave a wincing moan like an ox that is stricken for

the first time with the pole-axe; but no one paid any attention to her.

Gilbert Rutherford went on in the same low, even tone, as quiet as though at a sick bed, and the men listened as if in church. One had his head between his hands, leaning forward on the table. He had a father with white hair like Gilbert Rutherford, and he, too, was a son of the manse.

"My son had one little daughter, the child of this woman. She would have brought her up to be like herself——"

So said Gilbert Rutherford, hard for the first time that night. For he remembered the little lass who had said at his knee—

"Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me,
Bless Thy little lamb to-night."

He thought of her in this place, being reared among the cigar ends of my Lord Heronshaw. He had forgotten what she had learned from Bessie Upton, the play-actress.

"Brought up to be like herself," he said, dwelling on the words.

His daughter-in-law threw out her arms, trembling as a dead leaf hanging by a gossamer on a still, winter morn.

"No, no," she cried; "not to be like *me* Oh! cruel, cruel!"

The Great Preacher went on:

"An angel of light brought me that little girl to rear and to keep, tearing her own heart in the giving of her up."

He looked at the clock on the mantelpiece.

"At this moment that little maid is praying for her mother, and for the

best and purest woman in the world—a little child's guardian angel—for——"

"Bessie Upton, God bless her!" said Johnny Spencer, gruffly, from the door, that there might be no mistake.

And more than one man said "Amen" to that prayer of Johnny Spencer.

"Only a word more, gentlemen," said Gilbert Rutherford. "I offered a good and happy home to Miss Upton, with the little girl who loves her as her life. I asked her to come and help my sister to rear her. But she wished to remain to guard her own sister—to work for the woman through whom she was last night dismissed from her engagement. Gentlemen, by the love ye bear the good women who are your mothers and sisters, will ye help me to help this woman

who is better than I? For I that am by profession a servant of God besought this girl to forsake her sister for her own sake. She chose to remain for another's sake that she might save. Will you help Bessie Upton in her sacrifice or will you hinder?"

It is a strange thing that the men who had no sisters, and whose mothers had long been dead, were the most moved by this appeal. A tall man stood up, and going up to Dr. Gilbert Rutherford, he paused as if he would speak. But instead he held out his hand and shook that of the preacher. Johnny Spencer opened the door. The tall man went out with bowed head. One by one the men shook hands and passed out into the night. At the front door one of them said to Johnny Spencer—

"I say, how dared you do it? There were some of the wickedest men in London there to-night!"

Johnny Spencer laughed.

"I had heard the old one talk," he said. "I knew what he could do. He was just bound to fetch them, and I was taught to use my fists by Tom Jackson himself—no Poly' boxing classes for me."

When Johnny went in again, he found the minister holding his daughter-in-law in his arms. Her face was drawn and twitching. She seemed intensely eager to explain something, yet her tongue could not give utterance to the words. So hard did she strive to speak that the tears rolled down her cheeks, making pitiful furrows through the enamel.

They were so standing when Bessie Upton came in, followed by Aunt Re-

becca. She was in better spirits, for the manager had apologised and asked her to withdraw her resignation. As she entered she saw her sister supported by Gilbert Rutherford, and Johnny Spencer holding something to her lips. She ran forward with a little gasp of terror. There was a little yellowish foam about her sister's mouth.

"Elsa!" she said.

The eyes of her sister looked full upon her, and ran with tears. She struggled hard to say something, but still no word could she speak. Her mouth was drawn down at one side.

"Run for the doctor!" Bessie said, and Johnny Spencer sprang away. He had no idea where a doctor lived, so he coursed along the street like a dog from side to side, glancing at the brass plates. In a very few minutes he was ringing

at the door of Dr. Barfield, a young man recently established, a late house surgeon at Edinburgh Infirmary.

The two men came into the Vale Street house together. Elsa Rutherford was in bed. Her face was haggard, for Aunt Rebecca had washed off the cosmetics, and the lines of suffering and age showed plainly. Johnny Spencer stayed at the door.

"I 'm on hand if I am wanted!" he said. So he abode and talked to Tommy the boy, who had been pleasantly occupied in settling a difficulty of some standing with a lad from Foster's Mews.

"She has had a stroke," said the doctor at once, when he was out of hearing. He spoke in the Scottish language. "Her nervous system is a wreck. Rest, patience, quiet, good nursing—these are the only hopes."

He looked at Bessie, and knew that his patient would have all these. He resolved that on his side he should do his best. He noted Bessie Upton as she moved about with that subtle side-sway of lissom grace which the eyes of Stephen Armstrong had followed that day long ago as she walked down from the Kirk of the Hill. He was a young man and susceptible. Also, it is a good thing for a doctor to marry. In six months at the most his practice would allow of it. But when Bessie and the doctor came downstairs talking together, Mr. John Spencer, of Godown and Company, china merchants, 3, Threadneedle Street, easily read this purpose in Dr. Barfield's eyes, and, smiled to himself as he rubbed his hands.

"So?" he said to himself. "Johnny will be on hand."

During the days that followed, Godown and Company had not a great deal of Mr. Spencer's attention. Tommy the boy was constantly speeding from the Strand to the City and back again to Earl's Court, spending as he said, "a bloomin' fortin in trains." He put on insufferable airs in consequence, which caused older and stronger butchers' boys to chase him for purposes of assault and battery. Mrs. Cursitor was enlisted in the cause, and showed herself a paragon of cooks. Dainties went westward two or three times a day by Tommy the boy, who was a perfect Seagreen Incorruptible.

But at best recovery was slow and uncertain. Nevertheless Elsa Rutherford did not strengthen; rather the reverse. And every day Gilbert Rutherford sat at her bedside and talked to

her of her daughter or of his son—of other things also. Not seldem he spoke of the Way—but very gently and carefully. And the heart of the woman who had been his son's wife came to her again as the heart of a weaned child. Once from weariness he slept. Elsa very gently put out her wasted hand and took that of the Great Preacher. She kissed it and drew it to her breast. She nursed it there like her own child, crooning over it with world-less delight, while tears of grace fell thick upon the minister's black coat sleeve.

What sympathetic chord thrilled into the tired man's heart cannot be known, but certain it is that as this woman that had been a sinner wet his hand with her tears, he moved in his deep sleep, and spoke slow and clear, as though he

were giving out his text in church, "Neither do I condemn thee—go and sin no more"

This is a strange thing, and I cannot explain it, but it is true.

They were his Master's words, but it was the play-actress who had taught him their force. The minister slept on, but the woman lay back very quiet, with an expression of utter peace on her face. At that moment the sunshine struggled through the London fog and brightened her face. She went and sinned no more.

EPILOGUE.

THE play-actress was once more before an audience. It was not a large audience. It consisted of one —a little girl named Ailie. There were also some frisky lambs and some exceedingly matter-of-fact mothers, who looked as if never, never could they have been lambs and frisked upon the green. But these could hardly be called an audience. They were rather supers and scene-shifters.

The theatre was out on the broad field called the Home Park on the farm of Nether Larg, a field won by the hardihood of William Greig from the circumambient heather. There were great white gowans for foot-lights.

The arched sky and the wings of the white clouds made a glorious set piece. The play-actress was enacting the part of Cinderella. Her audience was in rapturous delight. Never was there such enthusiasm. But one thing marred the performance. There was no prince to present the slipper upon one knee, and say, "Fair Cinderella, wilt thou be my Queen?"

Ailie stated this difficulty more than once.

Now, it chanced that there was a prince. He was listening at the back of the great stone-dyke—also peeping. Which princes ought not to do.

He had a covert coat over his arm and had come down by the night train, walking over the fields from the way-side station.

Again Ailie said—

"How splendid it would be if we had a prince all sparkling with gold and jewels! It is such a pity we have no prince!"

The peeping Tom of a prince at the dyke-back sprang over. He took the little slipper that belonged to Cinderella which had fallen on the grass. He bent gallantly on one knee—a very proper prince. He kissed the slipper before he put it on.

"Fair Cinderella," he said, "wilt thou be my Queen—the Princess Johnny Spencer?"

And Cinderella held out to the prince the daintiest foot in the world, and the prince shod it with the slipper he had kissed.

Little Ailie clapped her hands with gladness.

"That is the best play in all the world," she said, "and I like it to end just like that, with a proper prince, and a slipper, and a kiss, and everything!"

THE END.